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PRIVATE EYE

STRIKE LATEST

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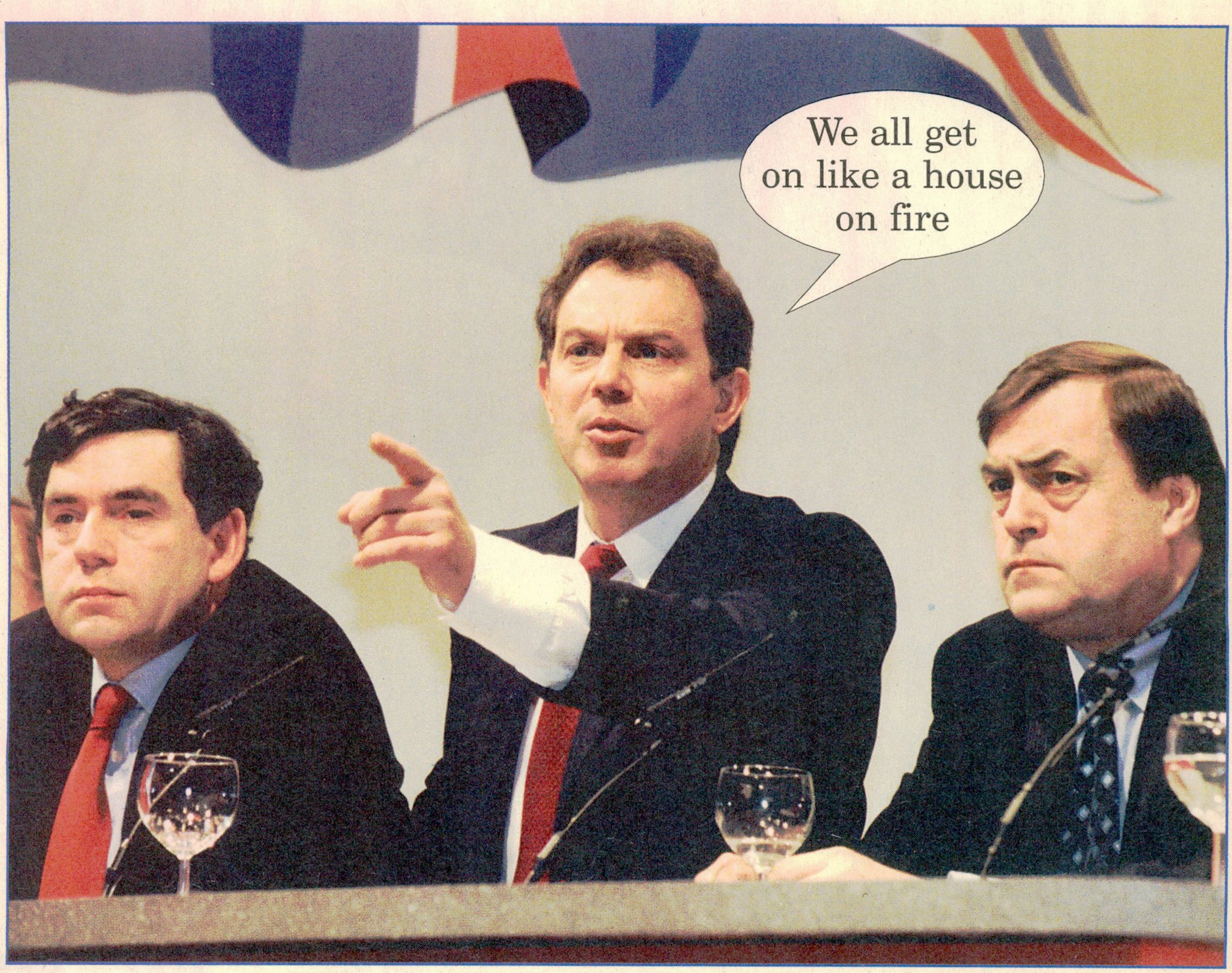

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See page 32 for details of book signings by the Private Eye team

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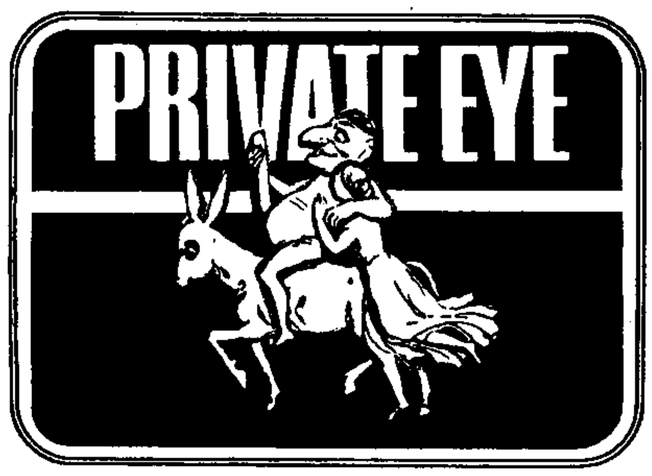

Fanning the flames

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THE Commons debate on Iraq saw an unusual amount of activity from the Labour whips' office even before the wording of the government's motion had been published.

Determined to ensure that every Labour MP – bar a handful of irreconcilable types – put their name to a bland statement backing the second UN security council resolution on Iraq, the whips set about telephoning MPs over the weekend more than a week before the debate even took place.

Some MPs were promised private one-to-one meetings with the Dear Leader; others were warned that future promotions to the government or House of Lords might be in jeopardy if they voted the wrong way. Foreign secretary Jack Straw even went out of his way to address the perpetually off-message left-wing Campaign Group of MPs. So why all the fuss and pressure?

Monday's vote ensures the government will not have to go back to the Commons until after war has been declared. The prime minister is determined that back-benchers are not allowed the chance to support a further recall of the UN security council should the White House and the Pentagon cast doubt on the UN weapons inspectors, UNSCOM, or claim Iraqi obstruction.

THE ministry of defence is hoping to sneak out its report into the most embarrassing cock-up imaginable by its privatised research arm, QinetiQ – the loss of a pallet of deadly anti-tank warheads and mines, believed to have floated off down the Bristol Channel.

The absurdly named QinetiQ – now owned by the Carlyle Group (European chair: John Major) – was supposed to destroy the unwanted warheads in a controlled explosion at the Thomas Head Military Range near Weston-super-Mare. One Saturday night last spring, "experts" took them to the mudflats on the busy Bristol Channel, intending to detonate them underwater at high tide early the next morning.

Unfortunately it seems they forgot about the strong spring tides which, it is believed, tore the pallet and its explosive cargo from the mooring with the whole thing drifting off into the shipping lanes. Either that or someone sneaked along and stole them.

An air and sea search with divers failed to find the warheads and they haven't been located since. The last dive was in October and no more are planned.

A spokesman for QinetiQ assured the *Eye* that tests done on a similar cargo immediately after the loss suggested the pallet of warheads would have become saturated and sunk fairly quickly, so it was unlikely to have presented a risk to passing vessels. But pity any fisherman who picks one up in a net.

An inquiry was launched by the MoD last May. Ian Liddell-Grainger, the Tory MP for Bridgewater who has been asking awkward questions about the affair, was expecting the findings to be published in the Commons library promptly. But an MoD press officer told the *Eye* the inquiry had already reported and a three-page summary had been sent to MPs and others "who had expressed an interest". Which is news to Liddell-Grainger.

The *Eye* hasn't seen the elusive document either and the MoD says it "can't track it down". But we do look forward to seeing it soon as soon as it turns up.

THE case of high-flying Kate Bleasdale, who won a record £2.2m for sexual discrimination by fellow directors and "bullying" by a "sexist" chairman, attracted a lot of attention. But nowhere was it noted that the chairman in question, Sir Tim Chessels, is a major figure in the NHS thanks to Labour's privatisation drive.

Bleasdale founded a nursing agency where Sir Tim became chairman following a flotation. He led a board that treated her with "a mixture of ridicule and contempt"; kissed her on the forehead before board meetings and finally drove her from her job.

Chessels, though, remains chairman of Catalyst, the private finance initiative (PFI) outfit that runs hospitals in Halifax and Worcester. He is also on the board of Care UK, a private firm which runs the London borough of Hillingdon's residential homes and sells mental health places to the NHS.

There was a time of course when Labour was less keen on allowing Chessels into the heart of the NHS. Back in 1994, Dawn Primarolo, then shadow treasury secretary, objected angrily to his appointment as chairman of the London Implementation Group, an NHS body which prepared the way for hospital closures in the capital. In parliament she even accused him of being a former Tory MP (which he wasn't) or at the very least being "a Tory".

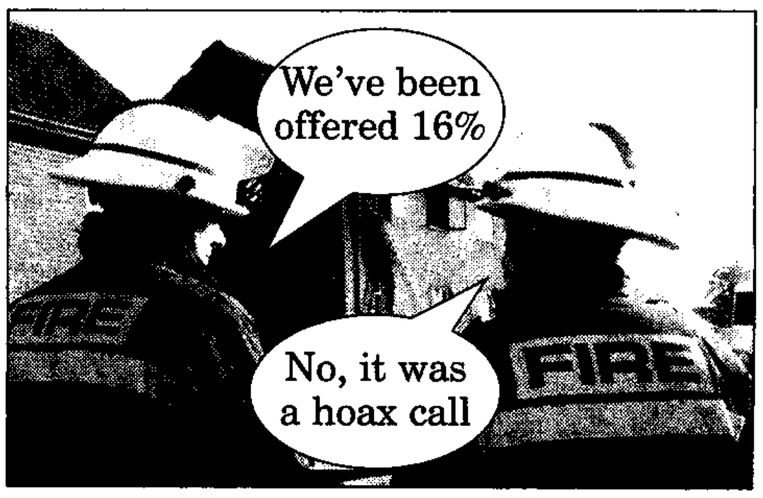
Now of course Red Dawn is more rosy pink and, as paymaster-general, she's only too happy to promote PFI schemes which put the "sexist", "bullying" Sir Tim centre stage in the NHS.

"When you look at other religions, the practice their way of life and their culture and it doesn't get that much attention but when it comes to Islam everything is blown up.

Evening Advertiser

ARE THE phoney pharaoh Mohamed Fayed's bankers becoming nervous of the amounts he is taking out of his far from prosperous bazaar – £74m last year alone?

It may be so, judging by a recent document produced by Harrods. This shows that earlier this month National Westminster Bank had been repaid a debt under which it held a floating charge on the business. This debenture was only issued in November 2000 as part of the £350m Royal Bank of Scotland refinancing package. Harrods UK has also been required to guarantee the Bank of Scotland for the liabilities of the Jersey company that bought the Kensington depository last year, thereby putting a much needed £50m into the Harrods coffers, most of which Fayed promptly took out again as part of the £74m dividend.



NEWS

ALL the usual suspects are sniffing around what promises to be Europe's most lucrative public sector contract – the 10-year project to run the Inland Revenue's IT services, which experts predict will be worth between £4bn and £7bn.

In a novel attempt to head off the usual IT procurement fiasco (cf passports, immigration, probation, national insurance, criminal records, etc), professionals who actually use the system are urging the government to listen to them before awarding the contract. The Public and Commercial Services union, representing computer staff at the Inland Revenue and the current main IT contractor, our old friend EDS, has surveyed those at the sharp end and told the government what is needed.

However, such a sensible, stakeholder-friendly approach is bound to be ignored. The smart money suggests the Revenue is so locked into its existing complex and huge systems – covering self-assessment, PAYE, national insurance and tax credits, with EDS and Accenture (formerly Andersen) – that to offer the new contract to anyone else would be almost impossible without disrupting the service.

"Let me through – I'm a Doctor Zhivago"

Street of Shame

WITH the Qatar-based satellite channel Al Jazeera facing financial problems following a Saudi and Egyptian advertising boycott, the station is looking for new investors and partners.

And, if the Israeli online news service Debka is to be believed, it has found one, in the unlikely form of Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the veteran Saudi ambassador to Washington. In an interview last year the prince denounced Al Jazeera as a "dangerous outlet" peddling "poisonous views". Yet now, according to Debka, he has quietly bought a 20 percent stake in the channel, to the fury of some other members of the Saudi royal family.

Whatever next? There has been a spate of recent stories in the *Times* praising Al Jazeera's achievements and plugging its forthcoming English-language service which (according to the *Times*) will be a serious international rival to "established broadcasters such as CNN and the BBC". Can it be that the Dirty Digger, who already broadcasts Al Jazeera via BskyB, is contemplating some stealthy stake-buying in the channel himself?

EASYCAR car rental has found an innovative way to retrieve vehicles that are kept out for longer than the agreed period. At the instigation of company founder Stelios Haji-Ioannou, drivers' names and pictures (every customer is photographed when they rent from EasyCar) are put on a special "name and shame" website.

"You must remember these cars are £16,000 assets," company spokesman James Rothnie told the London *Evening Standard*. "What is frequently the case with these people is that we are unable to get in touch with them. We have huge difficulties tracing these people."

This, however, was not the case with Geoffrey McVey, one customer named on the site and pictured prominently alongside the *Standard* article. McVey was burgled in August, losing among other things his credit card and driving licence, which he immediately reported as stolen.

Some weeks later he received a letter from EasyCar demanding that he return a vehicle he had rented from them. After an exchange of letters, he was told their records would be amended. The police officer investigating his case also got in touch with EasyCar to arrange to view their footage of the man who used the stolen card.

The next McVey heard about it was when he was "named and shamed" in the *Evening Standard*, along with a picture of a complete stranger – presumably the man who burgled his flat. EasyCar has now removed his details from the website but has failed to explain why it didn't check its records before distributing the picture to the press – or why it allows a car to be hired out on credit cards and licences that have been reported stolen.

EVERY week the *Sunday Times* News Review carries a slightly patronising rehash of the week's tabloids, and on 17 November it let rip over red-top coverage of royal minutiae.

"Any reviewer of the tabloids would be neglecting their duty if they failed to mention the big toothpaste story," the paper sneered. "It was the *Sun* that provided the best insight into royal life with its front page account of life at St James' Palace… 'Prince Charles relied on key aide Michael Fawcett to squeeze his toothpaste', reported political editor Trevor Kavanagh".

Of course up-market broadsheets would never bother with such tittle-tattle – well, not unless you count the *Sunday Times*'s story about Prince Charles' wallet on its front page. "Palace sources said that, like the Queen, Prince Charles does not usually carry money. This did not mean, however, he did not own wallets or was not given them," it revealed.

"THE Top 40 isn't in great shape… a raft of faceless acts, many from Pop Idol-style telly shows, are taking over," moaned Dominic Mohan in the *Sun*, marking the 50th anniversary of the UK singles chart.

"How has it come to this? Moneymen who control the chart puppet bands know the quick buck is made out of eight to 12-year-olds… slick marketing, monster hype and short shelf-life seem to be the key ingredients to breaking a Top 40 act today."

Anyone in any doubt could flip forward 12 pages to the "World's No1 Showbiz Column", Bizarre, which recorded the fact that "*Popstars: The Rivals* judge Louis Walsh has signed up Tara Palmer-Tomkinson to record a single", and devoted no fewer than 10 items to boy bland (*sic*) Westlife. Bizarre is edited by, er, Dominic Mohan.

PS: *Sun* editor David Yelland may have also noticed that Mohan is pisspoor. Six months ago his deputy, Victoria Newton, left Bizarre for the *Daily Mail* and the few decent stories on the page dried up. Last week Yelland announced that Mohan would be leaving the Bizarre column after four years as editor – to be replaced by Victoria Newton.

ROSIE Boycott's loud and energetic promotion of Princess Diana as the Greatest Briton of all time came as something of a surprise to former colleagues.

When she was in charge of the *Express* titles, Rosie rebuked *Sunday Express* editor Amanda Platell for running a story about Penny Junor's book, which claimed that Prince Charles had felt relief at Diana's death.

"Don't you ever go to the theatre, Amanda?" Rosie demanded. "There are far more important things in life than the royal family. Listen to me: *no one gives a damn about Princess Di!*"

A LOWLY tabloid sub-editor who recently inquired about buying a two-bedroom flat off London's Walworth Road was disappointed to be told that it was very difficult to arrange a viewing. "The owner is actually a very important man and it's always hard to find him at home," the estate agent revealed proudly. "He's editor of the *Sun*, you know."

The hack was suitably impressed. "Oh, that nice Mr Yelland," he replied.

"Who?" asked the puzzled agent. "Don't know who your Mr Yelland is. This is the real editor. Mr Jones, he's called."

Mike Jones, the vendor in question, is in fact deputy editor of the paper's website. Far from making important decisions about which slapper to display on Page Three every day, his task consists of retyping stories from the *Sun*'s printed edition and posting them on the internet. Colleagues at Wapping, who have to endure ceaseless bragging from Jones about his heroic journalistic exploits, will no doubt be glad to hear that he is living up to his nickname – "Top Man".

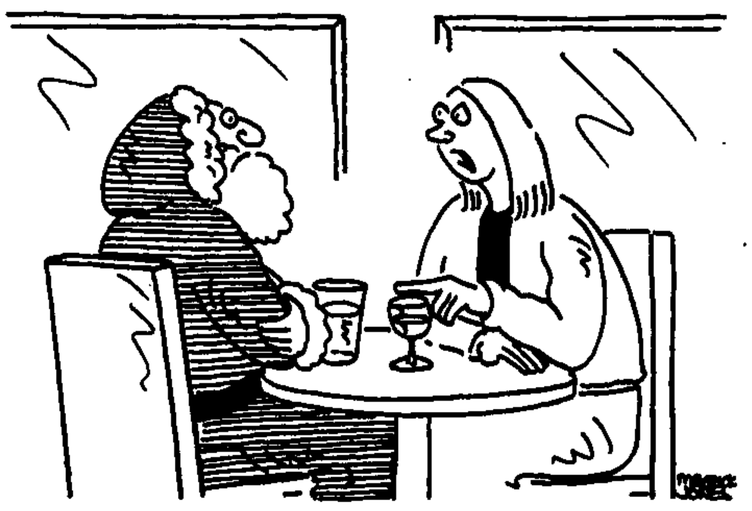
"A WEBSITE in America has published three secret Foreign Office memos which name senior intelligence officials and lists their job titles and telephone numbers," the *Sunday Times* revealed excitedly last weekend. The paper added, however, that it would not name the website, since "the government has asked the *Sunday Times* not to".

Alas, the effect of this loyal and security-conscious gesture was slightly undermined by the fact that the *Sunday Times* report included several quotations from the website. Using Google, it was the work of a moment for readers to type these in and find the full text of the secret memos on the internet, including names of senior figures from MI5 and MI6.

If even the half-witted readers of the *Sunset Times* are able to use search engines, no doubt the intelligence services of hostile foreign powers can do so as well.

THE London *Evening Standard* had only an hour to turn the collapse of the fire fighters' pay talks at 7am last Friday into copy for the first edition.

While the punchy, bullet-pointed front-page report did an admirable job, it was only after the presses had rolled that executives had time to ponder the appropriateness in the current climate of their chosen headline, emblazoned in extra-large point size: "IT'S WAR!" Later editions carried the slightly less misleading "STRIKE CHAOS FOR A WEEK".



"Ho, ho, ho. That's your answer for everything. Life's just one big joke isn't it?"

HACKWATCH SPECIAL

Above Contempt

IN APRIL this year the *Sunday Mirror* was fined £75,000, plus £54,000 costs, for committing a flagrant contempt of court that caused the collapse of the trial of Leeds footballers Jonathan Woodgate and Lee Bowyer.

After the "blunder", which led to the resignation of editor Colin Myler and two of his executives, Fleet Street collectively promised that it had learned its lesson about not prejudicing the outcome of criminal trials. Fat chance. A mere seven months on, prejudicial reporting has become so routine that some readers must wonder if the contempt of court act 1981 has been repealed without anyone noticing.

The act forbids publication of anything that might affect the course of justice – interviews with potential witnesses, speculation about motives, details of a suspect's earlier convictions or other allegations about previous behaviour. This applies from the moment of arrest, when proceedings are held to be "active", not from the time when charges are brought. Yet as soon as Ian Huntley and Maxine Carr were taken in for questioning about the disappearance of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman on 15 August, the tabloids dug up details galore about the couple's past lives which were clearly intended to demonstrate that they were, er, not entirely normal, alongside interviews with ex-lovers, relations and possible witnesses.

This torrent of prejudicial material continued, in a different form, even after they were charged. Extensive coverage of Carr's appearance at Peterborough magistrates' court on 21 August – notably of a mob screaming "rot in hell, bitch" and demanding the return of capital punishment – gave little indication that she was, legally, presumed innocent, or that she hadn't actually been charged with murder or abduction. "That woman is scum, she should be let out of prison and the public can deal with her," one bystander told the media.

Inside the courtroom there were further opportunities for hacks to tilt the scales of justice. The *Daily Mail* reported that the corners of Carr's mouth "turn down like a moody teenager's, and her dark eyes have a permanently distant look". And yet, oddly, it also claimed that her experience "didn't seem to have affected her too deeply... Her eyes remained closed for a while after she sat up, and everyone craned to see if there were any tears. There were not." Damning indeed. But were the Fleet Street hacks in court all weeping copiously? If not, did that prove that they too were callously unmoved?

"Much of the coverage has clearly been in breach of the contempt of court act," a senior police officer told the *Sunday Telegraph* on 25 August. "The stories relating the details of Huntley's background and alleged previous conduct have been especially shocking. We hope they do not stop justice being done." Both the police and attorney-general reminded papers of their duties under the 1981 act; to judge by two more recent incidents, however, no one was listening.

"Posh Kidnap: We Stop £5m Ransom Gang," the *News of the World*'s front page boasted on 3 November, reporting that legendary *NoW* hack Mazher Mahmood had infiltrated an Albanian/Romanian crime syndicate in London who wanted to kidnap Victoria Beckham. The headline had eerie echoes of one from 1997 – "We Smash £1m Fake Cash Ring". Then, as now, the suspects were arrested on the day before the paper appeared so Maz could have his scoop. When they came to court 10 months later, the two alleged counterfeiters were acquitted on the grounds that the article had made a fair trial impossible, and the *NoW* was fined £50,000 for contempt of court.

Although several weeks have passed since Maz's new sting, none of those arrested has been charged with planning to kidnap Posh Spice. Three of them have, however, been accused of stealing a jewel-encrusted turban from Sotheby's, and two others of conspiracy to commit robbery. Given that they had already been arrested by the time the news broke, the references to robbery in the original story were curiously free of qualifying words such as "alleged" or "suspected". Detective Inspector Ian Horrocks was quoted congratulating the paper: "You've done a fantastic job and taken on dangerous criminals."

In the *Sun* on 5 November, the day after the men made their first appearance at Horseferry Road magistrates' court, a report by *Daily Express* hack Adrian Lee referred to them as "a gang of thieves". In the *Sun*, Richard Littlejohn claimed that the arrests vindicated his decision to include an Albanian gangster in his novel *To Hell in a Handcart*. ("You couldn't make it up," he concluded, inevitably.)

The same day's *Evening Standard* had an 1,800-word feature by Steve Boggan under this heading: "Ruthless, extremely violent and accused of the plot to kidnap Victoria Beckham, Albanian gangsters are now the fastest growing crime threat in the capital." Still, at least the word "allegedly" did eventually appear, seven paragraphs later. Which brings us to the "alleged Arab terrorists" whose arrest on 9 November was eventually disclosed by the Sunday papers more than a week later.

"TUBE NERVE GAS PLOT: MI5 Foil 'Al Qaeda Poison Gang'," the *Mail on Sunday* revealed. The *Sunday Times* had been given the same steer, probably by Special Branch. "A gang of suspected Al-Qaeda terrorists plotted to kill commuters on the London underground by releasing poison gas in a crowded carriage," it claimed. "Six North African men were arrested in London eight days ago in connection with the plot, which security chiefs said would have caused chaos across the capital."

The facts of the case bore little resemblance to the sensational headlines. Three men had been charged with possession of "articles for the preparation, instigation and commission of terrorism acts" – false passports, allegedly. No chemicals or bomb equipment had been found. And the other three men detained had already been released. As John Prescott said on television: "In this case it doesn't appear that there is any evidence whatsoever that there was going to be a gas attack or indeed use of bombs regarding the three people who have been arrested."

But the damage had been done. On Monday morning, when the three defendants were due to appear before Bow Street magistrates, *Daily Mirror* crime correspondent Jeff Edwards reported that "the three alleged terrorists arrested were followed more than 100 times this year as they travelled around all 13 lines on the Tube network... The gang is said to have narrowed down the target area to the four busiest stations... Investigators believe the plan may have been to release cyanide gas at the height of the rush hour in the walkways and escalators."

The *Sun* quoted an unnamed intelligence source – "We believe that the latest round of arrests may have disrupted a terrorist operation" – and for good measure described one of the suspects as "a key aide of terror chief Bin Laden". If so, one might have expected a heavy presence of armed police officers when the suspects appeared at Bow Street that day; yet there was none. And during the hearing it was revealed that since being detained more than a week earlier, the three men had never been questioned about a "cyanide plot" or "poison-gas attacks".

Gareth Pierce, solicitor for one of the defendants, complained of "the quite extraordinary tidal wave of completely contemptuous and prejudicial coverage of this case". Just so. On the *Today* programme three days later, David Blunkett described the defendants as part of a terrorist cell – prompting John Humphrys to remind him that they hadn't even been tried yet, let alone convicted. If even the home secretary doesn't obey the contempt of court act, why should mere hacks bother?

AD NAUSEAM

WITH the self-regulation of all advertising mooted again in last week's communications bill, up pops another reminder of how current self-regulation for poster and press adverts doesn't work.

A recent campaign for the McDonald's McChoice menu, which offers any combination of eight lip-smacking McDonald's items for 99p each, ran with the jocular headline "40,312 Possible Combinations". This inspired 154 of Britain's keenest pedants to put pen to paper, triggering an Advertising Standards Authority inquiry into whether McDonald's had got its maths right.

Although the ad clearly did not intend to mislead, self-regulation requires complaints to be investigated. It was all a ludicrous waste of ASA time which could have been avoided had the ad been pre-vetted and cleared.

Nevertheless it did yield some delectable nonsense. McDonald's claimed its figure was based on a factorial of eight (8x7x6x5 and so on), to give every permutation of the eight items. The firm then subtracted eight from the final figure because, generously, it "believed single items from the menu should not be included".

When challenged by the ASA, McDonald's maintained that because some of the items on the McChoice menu were available in several flavours, it claimed there were actually 16 items on the menu, yielding 65,535 meal combinations – and if anything it had erred on the side of caution. And it had this for the nit-pickers: "[McDonald's] were aware that some people might consider a double cheeseburger and milkshake to be the same permutation as a milkshake and double cheeseburger, but they believed that each permutation could be considered a different eating experience." The complaint was thrown out and everyone went home to get on with their lives.

FOLLOWING *Eye* 1066's suggestion that the tobacco advertising and promotion bill would merely prompt cigarette marketeers to put their thinking caps on and work round the legislation, hats off to BAT's Rothmans.

It was announced last week that Rothmans is launching a "pub quiz" promotion on Royals cigarettes, in which smokers will find questions on their fags and be invited to contact the company with the answers in return for prizes and vouchers.

Under the new tobacco advertising "ban", fag companies can only market to consumers if they request information from the company. Neat, eh?

IDS shares drop 50% after earnings warning.

factiva (Dow Jones/Reuters) website

AS the Dear Leader took to the television on his return from the Nato summit in Prague to ram home his iron resolve – and that of his Iron Chancellor – not to give in to the inflation-busting pay claim of the fire fighters, the sound of knives being stuck into John Prescott's back grew louder.

Tony Blair is less than happy with his deputy's handling of the fire fighters' dispute and is acutely aware the government has taken some heavy PR blows from the Fire Brigades' Union (FBU). The biggest hit came as the FBU leader Andy Gilchrist demanded to know if the government had a strategy and who might be in charge of it – because if there were a strategy, Prescott clearly wasn't in charge.

In fact Prescott had been keen to reach an agreement and was hopping mad with Downing Street rottweiler and former *FT* industrial correspondent Philip Bassett for allegedly accusing the FBU leadership of being latter-day "Scargillites". But Prescott did not reckon on the resolve of chancellor Gordon Brown, who has effectively stymied negotiations by refusing point blank to consider the union's 16 percent claim – now some way from the original 40 percent demanded.

Prescott's civil servants had been intimately involved in the negotiations that led to a draft agreement being tabled before 9am last Friday morning when the second, eight-day strike was due to begin. The drafting team had included the employers, the union and outgoing TUC general-secretary John Monks. The plan was fully costed, and broadly in line with similar agreements offered to civil servants in the Inland Revenue, the MoD and Defra. But to everyone's surprise the deal was scuppered in the early hours – and the fire fighters resumed their strike later that same morning – without Prezza even reading it. The FBU claims Prescott simply took fright at the thought of what Tony and Gordon would say should he allow the draft agreement to form the basis for further negotiations, although the deputy prime minister was clearly more piqued by claims that he simply couldn't get up on time to read it.

Which might explain the following message left on Andy Gilchrist's mobile phone over the weekend: "Andy Gilchrist here. I can't talk about the fire fighters' dispute until after 9am. It's government policy."

DOWNING Street has been itching for a fight with one of the public sector unions for some time.

What finally got Blair's goat was the unions' refusal to back down at the autumn Labour party conference, where he and Gordon Brown got a bloody nose over the private finance initiative (PFI). Following the conference debacle, there was much recrimination within the Downing Street policy unit over whose fault it was; but then the glimmer of a hope emerged that Bob Crow and the RMT might launch another strike on the London Underground.

Downing Street sees Crow – who is not a member of the Labour party – and his hard-left executive as the weak link in the chain and unpopular with the public. Much hope had been invested in Crow "doing a Scargill", thus inviting a heavy-handed response. The hope is that Crow, by ordering yet another strike ballot on the Underground, will break secondary action legislation. Then Downing Street's rottweilers will be let loose again.

BOUNDARY reorganisation in Scotland may yet succeed in depriving John "the hammer" Reid, the new Labour party chairman, of his Lanarkshire seat.

Not that this should overly trouble the chain-smoking toughie whom Tony Blair has charged with bashing the unions. Feelers are already out to find him a new seat in the north-east of England, a familiar dumping ground for the leader's favourites. Though the singular lack of wimmin MPs in that part of the world means the first seven seats that come up before the general election must go to wimmin, these rules will not prevent a worthy retiring MP being elevated to the Lords at the last moment to make way for Reid.

PS: "The hammer" has come a long way since Neil Kinnock ordered him to stop boozing or else. During the 1980s bar staff in the Kremlin, or Strangers Bar, always kept four glasses of Scotch under the bar in readiness for two perennially thirsty MPs, the late and permanently pickled Nicholas Fairbairn – and John Reid.

"Higher education is all about lifelong loaning"

THE Liberal Democrats have gained quite a prize in former Tory MP Harold Elletson, who announced his defection two weeks ago.

"I realised that the values of progressive conservatism do not depend on the Conservative Party," the Old Etonian ex-member for Blackpool North told the *Daily Telegraph*. "If the party is incapable of espousing them, then people like me are going to look for other parties that will." Charles Kennedy was understandably delighted, describing Elletson as "one of a growing number of disillusioned Conservatives who realised that the Lib Dems stood for many of the things they care about".

But before the Lib Dems crack open the bubbly and find him a winnable seat, they should examine what Elletson cares about rather more closely. He was the most outspoken parliamentary supporter of Slobodan Milosevic in the 1990s, describing Margaret Thatcher's defence of Bosnia as "beneath contempt". In December 1992 he made the first of at least four trips to Yugoslavia as a guest of the Serbian president – at a time when, under Paddy Pantsdown, the Lib Dems were the most pro-Bosnian party in parliament.

Meanwhile his private company Harold Elletson Ltd, was retained by several large corporations – BP, Rothmans, Omega Oil and Gas – to help with projects in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. In 1998 he wrote a hagiography of the Russian "strongman" General Alexander Lebed, another unlikely hero for someone man who proclaims his allegiance to "progressive values". More curiously still, the book included highly sympathetic portraits of the authoritarian Communists who staged the *coup* against Gorbachev in August 1991.

There is another detail about Harold Elletson of which the Liberal Democrats may be unaware, though it was revealed by the *Observer* in December 1996: he also moonlighted as an MI6 agent. When Elletson became an MP in 1992, John Major personally authorised the intelligence service to continue using him as a "secret contact". Is he still working for the spooks? No doubt the Lib Dems will wish to find out.

TORY MP Peter Ainsworth, former shadow environment secretary, is acquiring a reputation as one of the caring, sharing, modernising new Tories following his abstention in the recent vote on allowing unmarried couples – including homosexuals – to adopt children.

True, as an Oxford undergraduate in 1978 Ainsworth tried to organise a public meeting for the jackbooted National Front leader John Tyndall, and then raged at the "sub-human filth from Ruskin College" who persuaded the Oxford Union not to permit the meeting on its premises. But, as he explained when the *Times* discovered the incident two years ago, this liaison with the NF was only a passing flirtation. "It was a stupid undergraduate indiscretion. Perhaps I was angry that day. I enjoyed annoying lefties. I had no idea I would go into politics… It was a joke between me and other students at that time."

It seems, however, that the flirtation was not quite as brief as that. Lord Gnome has obtained the Summer 1975 edition of Ainsworth's school magazine, the *Bradfield College Chronicle*, which describes a "mock election" held by pupils the previous year. "One hundred senior boys turned up in Big School to listen and ask questions to four parties ranging across the political spectrum: National Front, Conservative, Liberal and Labour (the far Left predictably was unable to find anyone to speak on its behalf," it reports. "The National Front had its policies ably and forcibly presented by Messrs Ainsworth, Hayes and Derrett, despite a threatened boycott of the platform by the Labour Party. Some confusion reigned when they tried to reconcile devotion to Empire and Commonwealth with forcible repatriation of coloured immigrants in the UK."

Perhaps he was angry that day as well.

SIR Howard Davies, chairman of the financial services authority (FSA) and his managing director John Tiner, former head of worldwide services at Arthur Andersen, got a terrible mauling from Tory members of the Commons treasury select committee in November.

Rough questions neither man could answer properly came from David Ruffley (Bury St Edmunds) and Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks). Ruffley and Fallon and others made much of the regulators' failure to protect investors in split capital investment trusts, which have lost so much for so many.

Messrs Ruffley and Fallon seemed very concerned that the regulator had been "asleep on the job". But they should be careful about probing too deeply into the problems of split capital investment trusts.

A director of two companies in the Jupiter combine – Jupiter Dividend Trust and the Investment Trust of Investment Trusts – is none other than Lord Lamont, former Tory chancellor of the exchequer. Both companies dealt in split capital investments, though a spokesman assured the *Eye* that all their debts have been paid.

WRITTEN questions to ministers in the Commons used to be answered promptly and accurately. But no longer.

More and more MPs are becoming irritated at the long delay in getting answers and the bland replies. Often these are along the lines of: "I will write to my Hon friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the library of the House" – a familiar answer that ensures nothing gets published in Hansard.

On 31 January, for instance, Labour MP Austin Mitchell asked the defence secretary what meetings he and his senior department officials had had with Enron and its subsidiaries in the last two years – a highly relevant question at the time of Enron's bankruptcy and corruption.

The answer came from junior defence minister Dr Lewis Moonie – on 7 November, just 11 months after the question. "I will write to my Hon Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the library of the House".

THE Confederation of British Industry has set up a terrific hullabaloo in advance of Gordon Brown's pre-budget report, claiming that business tax burden will increase by £47m up to 2005.

This is all very hard on treasury ministers and Inland Revenue chiefs who have done their best to ensure that "business" has privileged access to the inner circles of the tax authorities. In June, paymaster-general and treasury minister Dawn Primarolo set up a business tax forum.

The joint chairmen of the forum are the Revenue's business-friendly deputy chairman David Hartnett and Jon Symonds, a former star at tax avoidance specialists KPMG and now chief finance officer of the drugs firm Astra Zeneca – a company that made massive gains from the tax relief on research announced in the last budget.

The other forum members are two representatives from the CBI, one "other representative from business", the head of the Revenue's business tax department who calls herself a "champion of business" and the head of the Large Business Office.

CITY bankers, contemplating the hundreds of millions that one way or another are going to be paid by them and other taxpayers to bail out nuclear power, may be consoled to know it was one of their own who played a key role in launching Britain on this road to financial disaster.

Nigel (now Lord) Lawson was energy secretary for a short spell in 1983 when Margaret Thatcher was launching her bid to build 10 pressurised water reactors in 10 years. Lawson was appointed after her first choice, David Howell, had been judged too soft.

We know from leaked cabinet minutes that Howell had told the cabinet on 23 October 1979 that the government intended to construct 15 GW of nuclear power (that is, 15 gigawatts of 15,000 megawatts or 10 power stations each of 1,500 megawatts). But he buckled under the strain, became tearful and was replaced by Lawson.

Lawson told a Commons press gallery lunch on 19 January 1983: "All the economists who look at it say it is the cheapest form of electricity."

In the event only one station (Sizewell B) was built. The programme was then abandoned by a Tory government, mainly because it was not needed and was too expensive anyway, whatever Lawson and his school of economists had said. Now we can all enjoy paying for the blunder.

HOW to explain the opposition of Malcolm Rifkind, former Tory secretary of state for defence and foreign affairs, to a possible war with Iraq?

Rifkind wrote of his "deep reservations about the government's policy on Iraq" in the *Spectator* in September and raised similar doubts about following US president George Bush's lead into war in the Royal United Services Institute journal in June. Yet he failed to record that he has been a consultant to BHP Petroleum since 1997 – a firm that has tried to cut a deal with Saddam Hussein.

The company confirms that Rifkind is "an adviser on Middle East issues".

In 1997 BHP Petroleum looked at exploiting the massive Halfaya oil field in Iraq, an area with more than two billion barrels of crude waiting to be pumped. At the same time it reportedly looked at working on Iraq's Mansuriyah gas field. BHP joined firms like TotalFina Elf and Agip in looking to do deals which would have become more and more valuable had sanctions against Iraq been loosened.

BHP told the *Eye*: "We looked at the Iraq project around five years ago, but we decided not to pursue it." It added that, unlike other firms, "we have no interests at all in Iraq".

'Backbiter'

EXAM NEWS

STUDENTS concerned about bungling and grade-fixing by pisspoor examination boards may rest easy.

The latest instructions to history examiners from OCR says: "The quality of the English (grammar, punctuation and spelling) is NEVER be used [*sic*] as the sole criterion to pull an answer down into a lower band." So that's all right, then.

Meanwhile, many at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's headquarters secretly hope the biggest classroom union, the NUT, carries out its threat to boycott the national tests for 7 to 14 year olds.

The QCA's assessment, external marking and data collection teams are all said to be overwhelmed by the work already being thrown at them by education ministers; and a boycott of the standard assessment tasks (SATs) would be a relief.

This year's SATs nearly turned to disaster with non-participating schools being sent exam papers, participating schools being omitted and others not being sent enough papers. The QCA denied that an emergency team had to be assembled to sort out the mess but admitted that "a small number" of schools (just under one in 200) experienced difficulties – for which it "apologised unreservedly".

LONDON CALLING

KEN LIVINGSTONE'S assertion that the 83,000 households inside London's congestion charge zone will get a 90 percent discount, paying only 50p a day rather than the full £5 is, as so often with Ken, not the complete picture.

Discount vouchers can only be bought in blocks of a week, month or year, but not by the day. So the minimum payment, even for someone only using their car once a week, is actually £2.50 – a mere 50 percent discount. The system is actually better value for people who use their cars more often.

Those who wish to register for discounts with Capita, which is administering the scheme, must send in original vehicle documents, utility bills or bank statements before 24 December to avoid a £10 "administration fee". The alternative is to register at a post office – and pay £10 – next year. Given the fiascos of Crapita's performance over criminal records and individual learning accounts (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*), many are choosing to pay the tenner rather than risk Crapita losing important documents.

THE first edition of the Ken Livingstone fanzine *The Londoner*, produced at a cost of £1.8m to the capital's residents, contains news of what the mayor is doing to tackle litter.

"I have launched a four-year Capital Standard campaign to educate people about the problem of dropping litter," Ken writes, before soliciting readers' views. "Do you think cutting down the amount of waste we produce is important? The Mayor wants to hear your views."

Several Hackney residents plan to share with the mayor their strong views about the multiple copies of *The Londoner* that were dumped on their doorsteps on one of the wettest days of the year, bits of which have been blowing round the borough ever since.

"He's worried we won't be told when to panic"

ULSTER UPDATE

TAXPAYERS' money is being used to fund legal action against the media by senior Northern Ireland civil servant Bruce Robinson.

Last May, Robinson, permanent secretary and accounting officer at Ulster's department of enterprise, gave evidence to the Northern Ireland assembly's public accounts committee hearings into the NI tourist board – which recently resulted in a damning report (*Eye* 1067). Robinson was extremely miffed at press reports about the PAC not being happy with the quality of his evidence, so solicitor's letters were sent on his behalf by Belfast's top libel lawyer to four news organisations.

The civil service has agreed that Robinson can receive financial assistance for his ongoing actions on "public interest" grounds. The PAC, however, amplified its criticism of Robinson in its final report – which happily carries parliamentary privilege. It said: "The quality of oral evidence given by the accounting officer and supporting witnesses was most unsatisfactory. There were a considerable number of instances of what seemed to us to be inconsistent, evasive and even misleading answers to our questions."

BAIN IN THE NECK

SIR George Bain, vice-chancellor of Queen's University Belfast, announced in June that classics would cease to be taught at Queen's "due to low demand". The decision was about as popular as his recent ruling on fire fighters' pay and there was a similar disagreement over figures: Sir George maintained that only six students in as many years had studied Greek and Latin; the department maintained that last year alone it had 31 on the books.

A vociferous letter-writing campaign and petition received broad coverage in the press both north and south of the border, with MPs, assembly members and the poets Paul Muldoon and Seamus Heaney weighing in against the decision. Sir George, however, remained loftily dismissive of the press campaign and said there was "no chance" of saving the department. At the end of last month the university senate upheld the closure decision, leaving Sir George free to get on with sorting out the fire fighters' dispute.

EASY JOTTINGS

BUSINESSMAN Stelios Haji-Ioannou, like Richard Branson, pushes his own image on the public with as much vigour as that of his "easy-" brand. But as several companies who have dared to use the word in their own name have found out, Stelios is not quite the genial uncle he likes to appear. He can be quite difficult.

While easyGroup is unable to register the word "easy" as a trademark, it has aggressively pursued every possible permutation of it. Not content with the various potential company names it already has, it also pursues existing businesses it considers to be "passing off" as part of its empire – including ones that could never be competitors (easyelectrical.com, for example) and even ones that are spelt differently (easibook, a business-to-business accommodation booking service).

So many businesses have now been approached by Stelios' lawyers that a support website (easyhypocrite.com) has been set up for them, comparing the vastly different logos and sharing advice on how to deal with the threats.

Easyart, the online print shop and picture-framing service, was last month served with a writ by the vast international law firm Denton Wilde Sapte on behalf of easyGroup. The company, which employs just 15 people, is confident of mounting a strong defence – including the fact that when it launched in March 2000, banner advertising for its site was enthusiastically carried by, er, every single internet café in Britain owned by easyGroup!

FIVE TV

Popstars – The Rivals (ITV)
Great Britons – The Greatest Of Them All (BBC2)
Celebrity Big Brother (Channel 4)

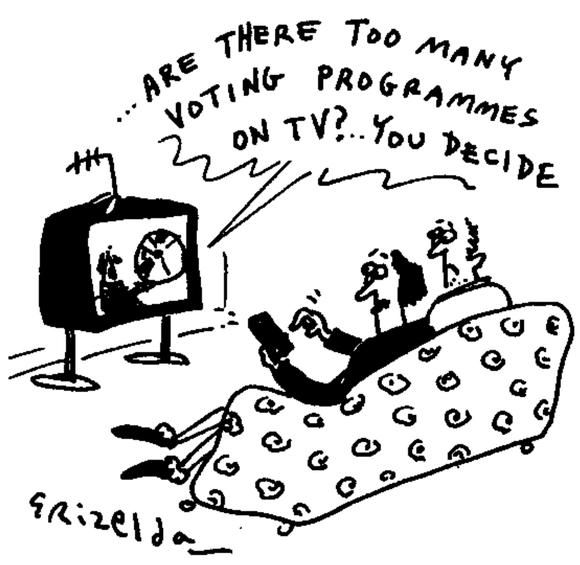
BRITISH people may have stopped voting in general elections but the life of the couch potato these days is a more or less permanent ballot. Last weekend alone channel-hoppers got to vote on the UK's greatest single person ever, the five blokes forming Pete Waterman's Xmas boy-band and whether Goldie or Les should be the first kicked out of Celebrity Big Brother.

First to the polls was **Popstars: The Rivals**, with the selection of the male half of the ticket competing for a Christmas number one. The dreary progress of this series has been a terrible warning to executives that populist TV concepts can have the shelf-life of pasteurised milk.

With record sales and the tabloid press both turning against instant hit-makers, it's a measure of how quickly this format has gone off that the biggest excitement to be had during the final was the schoolboy squabbling between judges Pete Waterman and Louis Walsh. Louis, who is manager of the girls' squad and whose big day comes next week, winds Pete up by referring to the male outfit as a "boy band", leading Pete to insist that it's a "male vocal harmony group".

The most interesting participant was Davina McCall, who looked increasingly uncertain and flustered as the programme went on. Unlikely to be nerves in so experienced a live broadcaster, this apprehension looked like unease about the cruelty of the format. These elimination rules were the most vicious seen in a game-show outside of Japanese TV: of the six remaining finalists, five would join the Christmas boy-band, with only one being denied the deal. The astonishingly long gap before Davina read out the fifth winner was, for once, probably not Tarrant-style theatrics but a genuine horror at what television was doing to the contestants.

The conclusion was even crueller than it at first seemed because, as McCall explained, record company deadlines meant that all six singers had recorded their tracks for the seasonal release, with the loser being deleted after the vote. Just as soap opera plots became more sensational as the market for such shows got overcrowded, so talent contest tele-



vision has responded to the battle between different versions of the format by ramping up the degradation.

One of the lads sang *Candle in the Wind* as his final show-reel for the British public, a shameless attempt to harness the Diana-factor to his cause, which brings us to to the final of **Great Britons – The Greatest Of Them All**. The credibility of this project could not have survived a victory for Diana, a dead Sloane who only entered British history in 1980, or for Brunel, his cause inflated by organised voting at the college named after him and some expert populist willy-waving by his advocate in this series, Jeremy Clarkson. So it was lucky for everyone that Churchill came through at the last minute, an utterly boring and uncontroversial but historically correct choice as, without him, this series would have been in German.

Admittedly there were many times when you wished it had been, anyway. The project created some of the year's best documentaries – Rosie Boycott on Diana, Andrew Marr on Darwin, Tristram Hunt on Newton – as well as three of the worst: Alan Davies on Lennon, Fiona Shaw on Shakespeare and Jeremy Clarkson on Brunel. And there was a constant gap between the high production values of the docs and the flappy, chaotic live studio elements.

For reasons that were never explained, Fiona Shaw had luvvied out of the climactic proceedings and the desperate stand-in as Shakespeare's champion on the night was A.A. Gill, whose *Sunday Times* TV column is largely devoted to attacking BBC projects of this kind. Mercifully Robinson almost never called on him.

Alas, it brought in ratings high by BBC2 standards and so prepare for the inevitable spin-offs: *Great Sport Stars*, *Great Americans*, *Great Soap Stars*, *Great Dogs And Cats*.

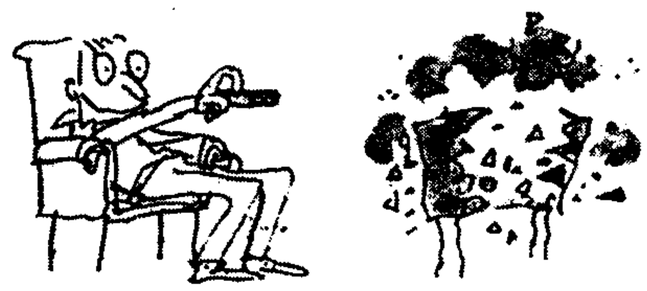
Before commissioning them, though, they should watch **Celebrity Big Brother**, which again illustrates the law of diminishing returns as it relates to television formats. Vanessa Feltz's crack-up during the first series was one of the TV highlights of recent years and had led the producers to believe that they'd get bigger stars the second time around.

In fact, the wiser viewers of the proceedings understood that, while it poses as a show raising cash for charity by inviting the well-known to be sports, it's in fact a final court of appeal for C-list celebs on showbiz death row. Watching Anne Diamond attempting to make a comeback is almost too painful.

In the end it was Goldie who got the chop, thus qualifying with Sir Winston Churchill and Pete Waterman's male vocal harmony group for a run-off vote to decide the greatest TV poll winner of the penultimate weekend in November.

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS



THERE are two burning questions about the newly-published communications bill. Why did the government changes its mind on allowing non-EU (ie American) companies to buy up our commercial television companies? And what will Downing Street get from Rupert Murdoch in return for handing him Channel Five?

The government's consultation paper on media ownership a year ago argued for keeping the rule which prevented non-European media takeovers. But now the government flings British media to the likes of Disney and AOL Time Warner. Did the weight of the argument force a U-turn? No. Out of 25 responses to the ownership paper, only four, including Murdoch's News International, supported the government's policy of abandoning restrictions unilaterally.

So why the U-turn? The answer lies with Downing Street and Tony Blair's key media adviser, Ed Richards. Although none of the well-paid corporate lobbyists and advisers can produce a shred of evidence about the benefits of American ownership, Richards has Blair's ear and both favour giving Murdoch and the American media everything they want.

There will be no more U-turns. The government will face down the Lords (even if it has to use the parliament act to do so). And within five years ITV will be just another distribution arm for an American multinational.

Channel Five, meanwhile, will go to the Dirty Digger. While the foreign ownership rules have attracted most attention, the spotlight has conveniently moved from cross-ownership rules that prevent any proprietor with more than 20 percent of national newspaper circulation from owning a terrestrial TV station. The government is planning to revoke this rule for Channel 5, but not for ITV. Why?

Ministers argue that C5 has a mere 6 percent of audience share and isn't worth worrying about. They have clearly forgotten (or never knew) what Murdoch did to the ailing *Sun* after snapping it up for a song 30 years ago. They also have no idea of the power of cross-promotion by a proprietor who now commands 37 percent of national newspaper circulation and will exploit it ruthlessly to promote his "minority" channel.

The end-game is all too obvious: BSkyB set loose and allowed to thrive in the free market; the BBC alone pretending to uphold public service; ITV and Channel 4 thrown to the wolves. And Murdoch's quid pro quo? Support in the war against Saddam; more muted opposition to the euro; unqualified support for Tony at the next election and beyond. Thus will Britain move a little closer to having her very own Berlusconi.

Plugged In

"I don't see why the BBC should be any different from Sky or Film 4 or any other digital channel, and have to go out in the world and make a living."

— Jonathan Miller, columnist in the *Sunday Times* (prop: R. Murdoch) quoted by Grant Rollings, columnist in the *Sun* (prop: R. Murdoch) in an attack on the BBC licence fee, the *Sun*, 7 November.

An occasional column devoted to cross-media plugs masquerading as news.

DUMB BRITAIN

Dog Eat Dog, BBC1

Ulrika Jonsson: Which composer wrote the collection of musical works known as The Planets?

Contestant: Tolstoy.

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: Sancho Panza was the companion of which famous fictional character?

Contestant: Rupert Bear.

BBC Radio Nottingham

Presenter: What canal connects the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean?

Contestant: Er... um...

Presenter: It has the same name as a type of cigar...

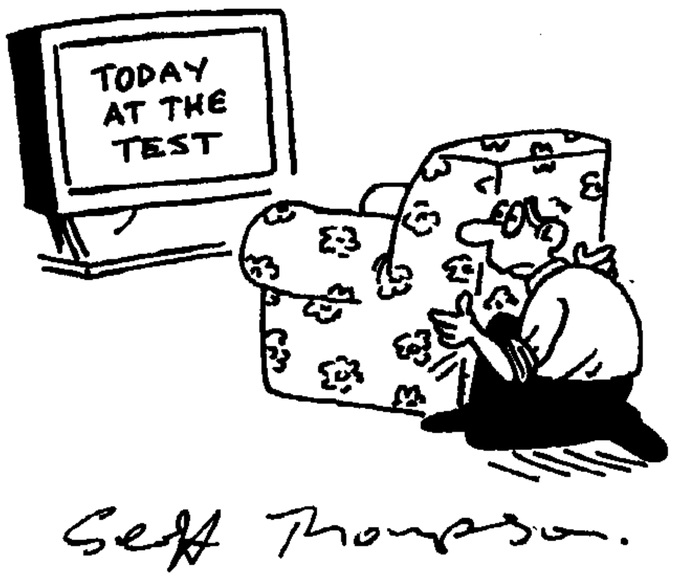
Contestant: Hamlet canal.

DUMB AMERICA

The Weakest Link, Playboy Centrefolds Special

Anne Robinson: Which character narrates all but four of the Sherlock Holmes books?

Contestant: The Pink Panther.



"NEW News, Old News", Ian Hargreaves's report about the nation's news and current affairs viewing habits, will make bitter reading at the BBC.

While ratings have collapsed (current affairs audiences are down by a third), the report reveals that the number of hours of news and current affairs coverage is actually up by 80 percent. So tons more telly is being watched by dwindling bands of increasingly disappointed viewers.

The problem for the BBC is that the decline appears to be in direct proportion to their efforts "to make news more accessible" – ie to dumb it down.

The continuous name-dropping ("well, Huw, well, Andrew"), the feeble Fergus Walsh "briefings" on the *Six*, the addition of an entertainment and leisure correspondent and the replacement of hard news with a poppy mix of crime, entertainment and human interest stories have actually driven away the very viewers editors hoped to attract.

MYRA Hindley's death will have come as a crushing blow to BBC producer Duncan Staff, who spent a great deal of time cultivating a mutually advantageous relationship with the Moors murderess. After her death two weeks ago, Staff wrote about "the Myra Hindley I knew" in the *Guardian*.

It is not the first time Staff has dwelled on this unsavoury case in the *Grauniad*. Some years ago the paper devoted endless columns to accompany a *Modern Times* documentary Staff made on Hindley and her campaign to be released. It may have pleased her, but it sparked a torrent of outrage from the families of the murder victims for pandering to her penchant for self-publicity.

Last year a further three pages of the *Grauniad* were devoted to plugging Staff's dubious documentary *Body Hunt*, which featured a failed "forensic" search of Saddleworth Moor for Keith Bennett, the one remaining victim who has never been found. All the programme achieved was to raise the hopes of Bennett's relations and then dash them: his brother Alan was reduced to tears.

In his latest *Guardian* article, Duncan Staff asserts that the television search has narrowed down the area where a body might be. Despite Hindley's death, he appears to be leaving the door open for yet more television excursions into the tabloids' favourite murder saga.

AS predicted in the *Eye*, the BBC is banking on a rising "smut quotient" to save the disaster that is *Fame Academy*.

Two contestants have already "snogged the face off" each other – their antics luridly shared with viewers of the growing number of opportunities to watch such pap: *Fame Academy*, *Fame Academy Live*, *Fame Academy Interactive*, CBBC, etc, etc.

GOING LIVE

HOW did BBC News 24 cover the death of Moors murderer Myra Hindley?

It went live on 15 November to John Thorne who was standing on a deserted Saddleworth Moor, half an hour after Hindley's death 200 miles away at the West Suffolk Hospital and 36 years after the grisly burials.

SKY NEWS is crowing over its latest signing, *Sun* columnist Richard Littlejohn, who will front a "provocative" talk show for the increasingly less impartial channel.

Could he by any chance be related to the Richard Littlejohn whom Rupert Murdoch lured back from the *Mail* in 1998 with a £800,000 deal which guaranteed him TV work, only to see his Sky One talk show *Live and Unleashed* axed after one disastrous series?

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore

Saddam West

BBC News staffers, alarmed at the pending belt-tightening caused by a denied £200m overspend, are making their own suggestions for cuts in the Beeb's propaganda rag, *Ariel*.

Top of the list so far are the corporation's ten in-house psychologists, on hand to provide "team-building, 360 degree feedback, coaching, development" and "culture analysis".

"Conflict at work is sometimes a result of basic differences between individuals," reveals one of their astute number, sadly singled out for the chop.

The absurd Making It Happen initiative is also a popular choice. No fewer than 16 lavish divisional teams, each with their own website and 18 "just imagine sessions" planned across the UK, are soaking up the readies. So far, all that has been "made to happen" is more car sharing, new flower beds, wall art and another layer of bureaucracy.

Number crunching

Licence to Overkill

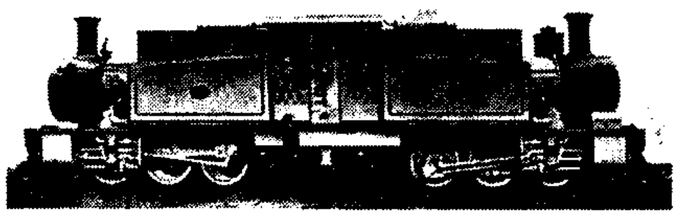
20 ■ James Bond films made in 40 years

12 ■ James Bond TV spin-offs broadcast in 10 days

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

AT A FASHION EDITOR'S MEETING:
THERE'VE BEEN LOTS OF COMPLAINTS ABOUT FUR COATS BEING BACK IN, SO LET'S MAKE THEM 'LAST SEASON' !!!
OKAY!
THIS SEASON, LET'S HAVE RHINO HORN AND PANDA EARS.
LOVE IT DARLING!!!



SIGNAL FAILURES

Jarvis déjà-vu

JARVIS, blamed so cruelly after saboteurs (still unknown) walked on to one of Britain's busiest railways to cause the Potters Bar accident, needs a new theory after a train derailed in south Yorkshire this month on another set of points for which Jarvis is responsible.

The train involved was only carrying freight so there wasn't a repeat of the outcry that dented Jarvis's profits after the fatal Potters Bar derailment in May (where bolts on a set of points had worked free).

On 10 November a loco and two of the train's 30-odd wagons derailed on points near Rotherham which had been out of use for nearly a week but returned to use by maintenance contractor Jarvis earlier that day. It didn't take investigators long to find why the first train to use the reopened points came to grief: a piece of rail was missing.

Railtrack's log of the incident, leaked to the *Eye*, states: "The voice tapes were downloaded and revealed a conversation between the signaller and a Jarvis staff member confirming that the points were commissioned." Could that rapid investigation indicate Railtrack managers were keen to block off potential escape routes for Jarvis this time?

PS: The mainline through Potters Bar was closed recently for new points to be installed in place of the ones that caused the derailment. But shortly before work was to begin a transport department official told Network Rail (aka Railtrack) to back off because the accident survivors were unhappy about it and the job was called off. How obedient of Network Rail – officially classified as a private company independent of government so Gordon Brown doesn't have its borrowing on his books (*Eye* 1059).

Blushing Virgin?

STILL no public censure from strategic rail authority (SRA) boss Richard Bowker, former co-chairman of Virgin Rail, over the problems encountered daily by passengers on the new-look Virgin Cross-country.

The "new dawn" Richard Branson plugged for five years has brought appalling overcrowding and delays (predictably: see *Eye* 1062). A leaked Railtrack bulletin shows that on 5 November just 47 percent of Dross-country trains arrived no more than 10 minutes late; and the six-day average was 37 percent (target: 90 percent). Passengers have been asked to leave packed new Voyager trains, overcrowded services have skipped stops, trains have bypassed Leeds and Reading to make up lost time and at least one guard has helpfully explained overcrowding is due to an "unexpected number of passengers".

Responding to a torrent of critical letters in the staff paper *Railnews*, Virgin Trains chief executive Chris Green reminded "everyone that we have had only two weeks' experience of the new Cross-country timetable as I write". Did Virgin really not expect overcrowding when it reduced seats on some routes by up to 44 percent or unreliability when it doubled the number of trains on some of Britain's most congested tracks?

Virgin may belatedly order a fifth carriage for the shortest Voyagers but that won't be ready for ages. The two carriages recently removed from each inter-city 125 train *are* available; but bringing them back doesn't feature in an "action list" drawn up this month by Virgin. Instead passengers can look forward to changed "stopping patterns in peak periods to prevent overcrowding" – ie more stops cut out – and "stand-by road coaches" for people who have full-price train tickets but can't get on a Voyager. Carriages confusingly lettered A, B, C and F (F for "club class") will become much clearer: A, B, D and E (sic).

Virgin will reward itself for causing so much hassle by effectively raising fares, with "value tickets diverted from overcrowded trains" such as on Friday and Sunday evenings (when lots of people need to travel). Value tickets will be

"restricted to quietest periods" over Christmas and on summer Saturdays.

Virgin's concept of twice as many trains but each with fewer carriages contradicts the SRA plan for best use of precious track capacity (*Eye* 1065). But instead of ordering Virgin to lengthen its trains substantially or forgo some of its track slots, the SRA is handing Beardie's company lots of extra public cash (*Eyes passim*).

Meanwhile Bowker and his SRA team have produced a draft strategy for the bungled west-coast renewal. To justify putting Virgin's needs ahead of the other train operators on the line, the strategy takes into account the "very significant investment" on Virgin's behalf in new trains for west-coast and Cross-country services. But the strategy doesn't acknowledge nearly £1bn invested in goods wagons and 400 freight locomotives, many of which use the west-coast line too. (That equipment, unlike Virgin's new trains, isn't underwritten by a guaranteed government bailout if things go wrong.) Of course, it's just coincidence that the freight companies whose investment was overlooked contribute nothing to Virgin's profits.

PS: GNER passengers at Doncaster station got the Virgin treatment too recently when they were told "this train is not leaving till some people get off because it is dangerously overcrowded". It stayed on the platform for a full 25 minutes.

'Dr B. Ching'

DOING THE ROUNDS

Heart Failure

WHY is "new" Labour sitting on publication of the report from the Paediatric and Congenital Cardiac Services Review Group (PCCSRG)? The group was assembled in March 2001 after the (late) government response to the (delayed) Bristol Inquiry report, and its own report has been gathering dust at the department of health for more than six months.

So 10½ years after the *Eye* broke the Bristol story, the government hasn't even announced, let alone implemented, how child heart surgery in the UK is going to be reorganised to prevent any future disasters.

Two years ago, M.D. (wrongly) predicted that the Bristol Inquiry would recommend a reduction in the number of centres performing child heart surgery from 13 to 6. This would centralise expertise and resources, comply with European law on doctors' hours, let staff gain more experience in their chosen specialty without exposing patients to dangerous learning curves and allow more meaningful audit to be collected. The downside is that it would cause severe political embarrassment in constituencies which had to lose their units.

Instead the inquiry ducked the issue by recommending a review of all the centres by the PCCSRG, on the understanding that it would be published.

Part of the delay is because "the initial report came back to the group with requests that the conclusions be changed to match the expectation of the ministry". This was unanimously rejected by the group. Further hold-ups may be because an initial pledge for the department of health to ring fence funding for audit appeared to disappear in the final draft. M.D. has strongly campaigned for protected audit funding to ensure any data used to judge the quality of care and released into the public domain is as accurate as possible. Without it, publication of inaccurate surgeon-specific data would submerge cardiac surgery in a quagmire of litigation, unfair suspension and refusals to operate on high risk cases, while not protecting patients from bad practice.

The DoH appeared to have grasped this nettle at the final meeting of the group in May 2002, committing itself to continue to cover the costs of the national audit database (CCAD) and to provide £1m for local audit collection for each unit each year at least for the next two years. This commitment did not appear in the final draft, but after several group members refused to sign it, the DoH has now made this explicit and also promised publication "very soon".

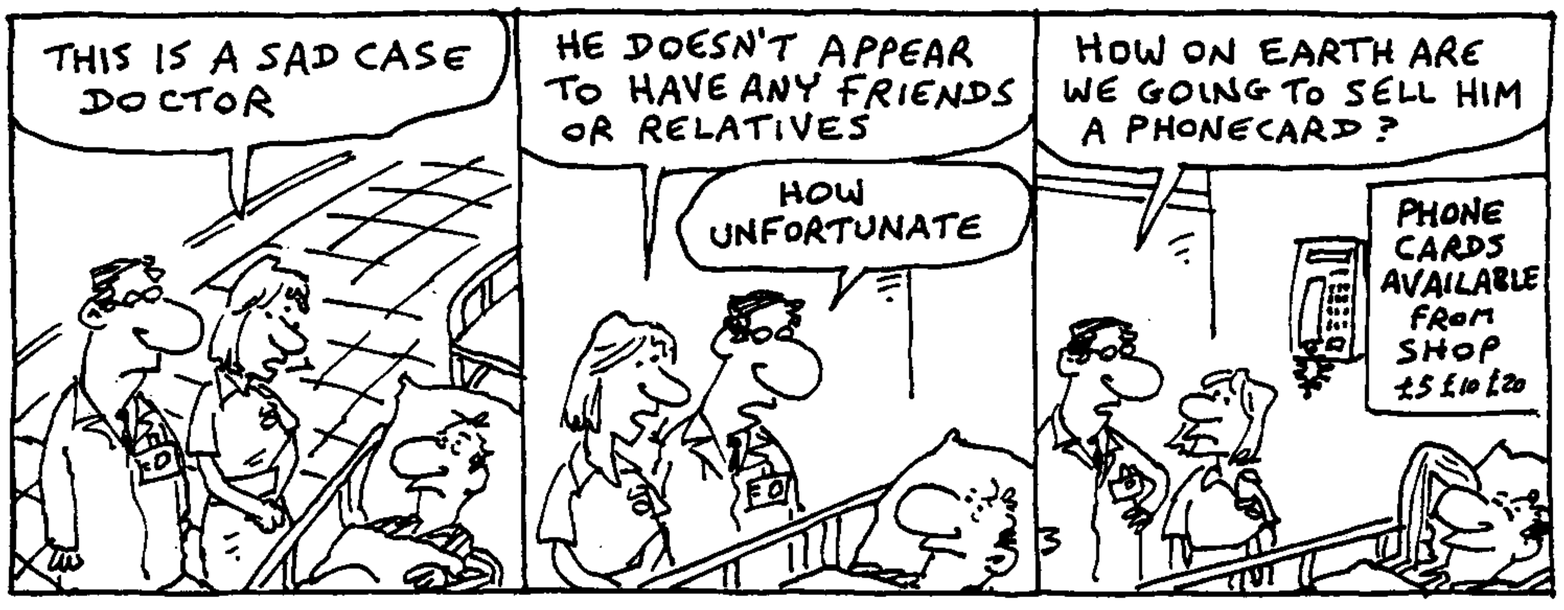
Alas, rather like the Bristol Inquiry before it, the PCCSRG can only make recommendations that ministers are under no obligation to endorse. The key sticking point remains the closure of units, which the government may try to fudge by keeping all 13 open but somehow "linking them up". The sensitivity of the issue was made apparent by Len Fenwick, chief executive of Newcastle hospitals NHS trust, who told the PCCSRG he would fight any threatened closure by getting patients and local MPs campaigning on the streets. As one of his local MPs is Alan Milburn, it would give the health secretary an intriguing dilemma.

Child heart surgery is just one of many specialties that need concentrating in fewer, larger units; but after the loss of Kidderminster, Labour is in no hurry to push through this vital reform. Patients are dying or suffering substandard care across the UK so MPs can keep their seats. So who will put pressure on the government to take reconfiguration seriously? Maybe it'll be Ian Kennedy, ex-Bristol Inquiry chairman and now chair designate of the massive Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection. In 1998, he promised "to make recommendations which would secure high quality care across the NHS". Maybe now he can finish the job.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY


THIS IS A SAD CASE DOCTOR
HE DOESN'T APPEAR TO HAVE ANY FRIENDS OR RELATIVES
HOW UNFORTUNATE
HOW ON EARTH ARE WE GOING TO SELL HIM A PHONECARD?
PHONE CARDS AVAILABLE FROM SHOP £5 £10 £20

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

AH SOLE

COLIN WEDD, former leader of Doncaster council and chairman of its racecourse committee, really should have been a detective or a reporter such is his obsession with getting the facts.

Last year he flew to Pisa on a five-day "fact finding" freebie to investigate the running of the local racecourse (*Eye* 1022). Now he's just back from another five-day "fact finding" jaunt – this time to Japan "to assess the economic impact of Kyoto's horse-racing industry and the newly developed airport in Kansai". Wedd was accompanied by his wife Constance, Tory councillor Barbara Hoyle and her husband Derek.

The group was led by Doncaster chamber of commerce director Neville Dearden, who mysteriously says of Kyoto: "The similarities between our two towns is clear." Whatever did he mean?

Perhaps he was thinking of one of the objects of the group's interest, Kansai international airport. Since opening in 1994 it has been an environmental and economic disaster. The project came in at twice the original estimates and labours under a deficit of some $1.5bn, 30 percent of which is funded by local taxpayers. Commercially it's a flop because major airlines are unwilling to pay its exorbitant fees. Billions of yen are needed for work to stop the runways flooding because the island on which the airport is built is sinking into sea.

In 1990 *Private Eye* 736 wrote about the Kansai project as an example of a corrupt Japanese practice called *dango,* in which construction companies do secret deals to keep contract prices high with the aid of generous bribes to officials. In 1997, around the time Donny's bent councillors started to have their collars felt, Hattori Tsunenori, a deputy transport minister and president of Kansai International Airport company, was arrested and charged with accepting a 2.7m yen bribe from a contractor. But that can't be the sort of "similarity" Mr Dearden has in mind.

PS: Cllr Wedd clearly regarded the *Eye*'s call to ask about his trip as impertinent. But he did say, before hanging up, that the dire history of Kansai airport was "all news to me". For a "fact-finding" expedition, he seems to have come home with very meagre facts.

● **MONMOUTHSHIRE county council is considering flogging its 3,900 council houses and has brought in Malcolm Temple, a director of housing consultants Beha Williams Norman (BWN), to advise. The council claims it's very open-minded and nothing has been decided yet. But BWN, which has "advised" dozens of councils about stock transfers, is not on record as having told many that the best option is to hang on to their council houses. Front-runner for the contract to act as the obligatory "independent tenants' adviser" to represent the interests of Monmouthshire's council tenants is the Heart of England consultancy, an offshoot of Stratford-upon-Avon based Heart of England Group. The chief executive just happens to be one Wendy Temple, wife of Malcolm. So no stitch-up there, then.**

PS: Monmouthshire council's spokesman says: "The council has decided to immediately undertake an investigation of the issues raised by *Private Eye*. A full and frank account of our findings will be published in due course."

JUSTINE TIME

ISLINGTON resident Justine Gordon-Smith appears before Highbury magistrates this week charged with council tax arrears – even though her council tax isn't in arrears.

In fact it is paid until March 2003. But Ms Gordon-Smith, a freelance film-maker, attracted the wrath of Islington's council tax department (headed by A. Nutter) because, when it decreed that her monthly payment day at her local post office was changing from the 15th to the 1st of the month, she continued to pay on the 15th because it suited her financial situation better — thereby being two weeks "late" every month.

Although she has always paid her taxes regularly, by cheque, she believes "there should be some flexibility for people with irregular incomes, the low-paid and those who, for whatever reason, do not wish to pay by direct debit". As she points out, Islington tolerates great "flexibility" on the part of its useless contractor ITNet in processing housing benefit applications, to the financial and emotional distress of thousands of poorer residents who are left out of pocket or threatened with eviction. So Ms Gordon-Smith, despite having paid her council tax in full, plus a "late payment" charge, is going up before the beak this week to argue for justice against the bullying Nutter.

● **WESTMINSTER council may have "excepted" the £38m surcharge owed by Dame Shirley Porter from its draft annual accounts (*Eye* 1067), but its legal team will still seek a high court order in the new year, freezing all the assets the fugitive dame transferred to family and friends in an attempt to avoid paying what she owes. Meanwhile a charging order has been placed on a Westminster flat in which Porter was found to have a 50 percent stake. So maybe she's not down to her last £300,000, as she claims, after all.**

BARNET BARGAIN

COUNCIL taxpayers in Tory-run Barnet are rubbing their eyes in disbelief at the extraordinary incompetence of the borough's former Lab-Lib coalition which, as one of its final acts in March this year, handed a piece of council land worth £5.7m to a businessman for just £10,000.

The lucky beneficiary was Barnet football club chairman Tony Kleanthous, whose holding company now owns the freehold to the club's stadium. A punctuation error in the contract drawn up by the borough means he will be able to sell the land after 10 years and pocket all the proceeds, whether the council likes it or not. The error was not spotted because a supposedly public report on the deal mysteriously never appeared and a computer glitch meant even most councillors were kept in the dark.

At least that's how the chief executive's report explains the fiasco to the new Conservative administration. Deeply unimpressed, the Tories have commissioned a second, independent inquiry.

● **DURHAM's Gala Theatre has axed the disastrous film *The Sacred Journey*, which was commissioned by Durham city council chief executive Colin Shearsmith from his chum Brendan Quayle at a cost approaching £1m of taxpayers' money.**

The film, which attempts to tell Durham's history in 20 minutes, was supposed to attract more than 100,000 visitors a year. In fact it has been playing to audiences in single figures. This column raised serious concerns about Quayle's credentials and the way the film was commissioned without proper tendering back in 1999 but the council ploughed on regardless. Starting in December: *The Lion King*. Departing in January... Colin Shearsmith?

EDUCASHUN NEWS

THE London borough of Haringey was chosen by "new" Labour as a beneficiary of the private finance initiative (PFI) – so imagine local rejoicing when it was announced that eight secondary schools would be refurbished and run by PFI specialist Jarvis, hero of the Potters Bar rail disaster.

The contract was let by Haringey council in October 2000 and the scheme is meant to be finished by September next year at a cost (to the public) of £40m. But from the outset councillors and contractors were plagued by complaints from school governors, parents, unions and even ungrateful Labour councillors who were unimpressed by the plans.

Now the *Eye* has seen a distressing letter from Haringey councillor Judy Bax, executive member for life-long learning, to the secretary of state for education. She reveals that because the project broke new ground for PFI, "we did not have the benefit of being able to draw on the experiences of other PFI projects". So "the scope of the project did not include furniture and equipment for newly-constructed buildings, complete access for wheelchairs, comprehensive cabling IT provision and building cooling systems to reduce solar gain". All these features had been left out so "other funding would have to be identified" to pay for them.

Ms Bax concluded that the cost would be just over £2m. So who should pay? When the government indicated recently that it wasn't going to pay, Ms Bax warned that this obduracy was likely to confirm the local rebels in their hostility to PFI. Then she had a brainwave. "There is a need," she revealed, "for substantial investment in a number of our primary schools and one way of achieving this would be through a PFI contract. It would be very difficult to achieve this with the agreement of schools unless the matters identified in this letter have been resolved satisfactorily."

In other words: give us the money for the secondary school equipment we forgot when the contract was signed or forget the PFI for primary schools. The threat worked and the government (taxpayer) coughed up.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER

IN THE WAKE OF THE DISAPPEARANCE OF OUR BELOVED BURMESE BLUE, "BELMONDO", IT'S GREAT THAT YOU'RE ALL PITCHING-IN. WHAT ARE YOUR STATUS REPORTS?
I'M SCOURING LOCAL CATTERIES
I'M PLACING ADS IN LOCAL PAPERS
AND WE SHOULD HAVE A WEBSITE GOING LIVE IN THREE MONTHS
"WHERESBELMONDO.COM" COULD BE THE BREAKTHROUGH WE'RE ALL WAITING FOR!

NOOKS and CORNERS

AN extraordinary private website has been brought to my attention, and very instructive it is too. To be found at www.sproughtonwatermill.com, it is entitled *Sproughton Water Mill: The Listed Building Nightmare* and is the work of Mr Robert Jones, who bought the derelict mill in 1995.

Mr Jones has a large and festering grievance: hence his sophisticated site which reproduces a mass of documents illuminating his battles with Babergh district council in Suffolk, threats from whose legal department have removed some matter from the screen. If even half of what is left is true, however, then what has happened to this grade II listed building is indeed scandalous.

Sproughton Water Mill, a handsome red-brick structure in the "Functional Tradition", was built over the River Gipping around 1817-20 for the Constable family of East Bergholt by the engineer Sir William Cubitt. It remained in use until 1946 when it was bought by the Hughes-Reckitt family, who removed the internal machinery. In 1989 the mill was offered for sale. It not having sold, in 1992 the owner, Patrick Hughes-Reckitt, applied to demolish it, claiming it would cost £270,000 to restore.

In the same year the Suffolk Mills Group tried to buy the mill and found that, according to consulting engineer Brian Morton, an admired specialist with experience of historic structures, it was not in imminent danger of collapse and would cost only £66,500 to restore.

Mr Jones bought the derelict mill in October 1995 with outline planning consent for conversion to residential use. He claims that at the time he had no idea there had been controversy over the building nor that the Suffolk Mills Group had been trying to buy it for several years. It seems, however, that acquisition by the Suffolk Mills Group was the favoured option of Babergh district council and its senior conservation officer, Richard Ward.

In November 1995 the council served Mr Jones with a repairs notice under section 54 of the planning act. In January 1996 Mr Jones was told that the council's planning committee would grant planning permission and listed building consent for his proposed restoration and conversion work if he submitted amended drawings. In May 1996 he was served with a section 78 emergency measures notice. Under this the council carried out what it regarded as necessary works to ensure the stability of the building. These were completed by the following September — when Mr Jones's planning application was at last given permission. He was then presented with a bill for £85,000.

All this is most remarkable. Notoriously, local authorities are very reluctant to serve repairs notices and emergency measures notices lest they be saddled with the cost. Local authorities usually use the powers of intervention they have — rightly – to protect a listed building only when an owner has conspicuously neglected it for decades and even then only when they are goaded into action by English Heritage, amenity societies, SAVE Britain's Heritage or the local press. In this case (as Mr Jones tells it), Babergh council started legal action a mere 57 days after he had purchased Sproughton Water Mill, and the council moved in to safeguard its future *after* Mr Jones had applied for the consents to carry out work himself.

While I dare not comment on the rights or wrongs of the case (lawyers have long been involved), what is clear from the evidence of photographs on screen is that something *horrible* happened to Sproughton Water Mill in 1996. Mr Jones has complained about the standard of work, as well he might.

The new piles were not driven in to the depth specified; the pantile roof was repaired with unglazed pantiles, of a different colour and some broken, which, with cement repairs, makes it look worse than before, while the council workmen damaged the underfelt; the brickwork was repaired with much wider pointing and using a hard cement mortar mix instead of the lime mortar which is now recognized as the best for historic buildings – especially ones which, like this one, need to move. Worst of all is the fact that a whole corner of the building – four storeys high – was taken down and when it was rebuilt the windows on one elevation were three courses out of alignment with those on the other.

So, a listed building has been spoiled and changed… yet the local English Heritage inspector has approved the work. What has been going on? Perhaps we shall find out soon. In 1999 Mr Jones appealed under the planning act that the works carried out by Babergh district council were unnecessary and that paying for them would cause hardship. The secretary of state's decision is due next month.

'Piloti'

I-SPY

£10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

Czech Republic.

Submitted by S. Cane

Chester.

Submitted by Jim Capper

Norway. **Submitted by Steve Hatton**

LIBEL NEWS

ONE mystery remains in the collapsed libel action brought by Cornish accountant John Stuart Condliffe against *Private Eye*. Why were the copious files belonging to Condliffe's clients – which formed the backbone of evidence – disassembled and rearranged chronologically and by whom?

Readers who followed this potentially ruinous case against the *Eye* will recall that in July 1993 the world's most expensive lawyers, Peter Carter-Fuck and Partners, issued a writ against us on behalf of Condliffe. He claimed that we had libelled him when we reported in March 1992 how, as the only chartered accountant in the firm of Condliffe Hilton, he had systematically charged clients, mostly small traders, far more than his original estimates.

The case finally reached the high court in October 2001. The allegations related to some 30 of Condliffe's clients of whom the *Eye* had spoken to 15. The individual files Condliffe had been jumbled up and rearranged in chronological order in one massive file, which made it virtually impossible to follow an individual's affairs and led to the court being burdened with a massive 113 bundles of evidence.

Condliffe's action ended dramatically in its sixth week when Mr Justice Gray decided that questions had arisen that raised serious doubts about Condliffe's credibility. Those questions concerned the rearrangement of the files. Condliffe insisted that he had delivered the files to his solicitors in the form in which they had been kept at his office. However, Carter-Fuck had written to the *Eye*'s solicitors saying they did not receive the files from Condliffe in their original state. As a result of this highly embarrassing disagreement with his own solicitors, Condliffe was forced to withdraw his claim and agreed to pay £100,000 towards the *Eye*'s costs.

However, a new piece of evidence has suddenly come to light – in a witness statement made by Condliffe to Truro county court as part of his bid to stave off bankruptcy. Condliffe repeats his claim that he delivered his files to his lawyers intact. He states that it was Carter-Fuck who reassembled them, rendering them "virtually incomprehensible". Then Condliffe makes an extraordinary and, if true, extremely serious claim: "When I questioned what had been done, I was told by PCR that it had been done to 'make life difficult' for the other side's solicitors so that they would be encouraged to offer settlement terms." Carter-Fuck denies the allegation.

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS BY BIRCH

TURNER PRIZE 2002
I love how Fiona's piece provocatively deconstructs Pornography.
EXIT
It's certainly outraged the bourgeois art-viewing public!
SHE MOAN'D LOADLY HE AND HIS MATE GOT THERE NOBS OUT LOT'S OF CUM ALL OVER. THEN SHE
Disgraceful! Simply stuffed with spelling mistakes!
Offensive colours! I could scarcely read a word!
Shockingly sloppily mounted!

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

JUST a day after the *Guardian* announced that ENO had earmarked stage director Graham Vick to replace the company's ousted boss Nicholas Payne, the paper was forced to run an embarrassing retraction.

The paper's arts correspondent had quoted a clear endorsement for Vick from the ENO press spokesman Jane Livingstone, lauding Vick's qualifications for the job, including triumphs on the Sussex Downs which had apparently turned Glyndebourne into "the most experimental" opera house in Britain.

This was of course a farrago of nonsense as the next day's correction made clear, regretting the (many) inaccuracies of the piece and admitting that the Jane Livingstone quote was made up. It might have added that its arts reporter only had the vaguest notion of how to spell the names of standard repertory operas and the vaguest notion of what happens at Glyndebourne where "most experimental" house in Britain is not exactly it.

What's more, Vick's track record as director of production there was mixed, with good work at the start but a whole flock of dead ducks at the end. By common consent he was taking on too much and the ideas had dried out. Hardly a commendation to be saviour of the Coliseum.

The truth is, no one at ENO knows who's on the shortlist except for the committee of four set up by chairman Martin Smith to appoint Payne's successor, and so far they're giving nothing away. But to call Vick the frontrunner is absurd and overlooks the fact that were he appointed, a good number of ENO's more valued staff would walk.

They seem to think Vick is curmudgeonly, rude and difficult to deal with. Still more critically, he's not the kind of character to get along with the urbane, smooth, bow-tied banker Smith.

Meanwhile one name that can be safely ruled out is Nicholas Snowman, late of the South Bank and (briefly) Glyndebourne, who has just been given charge of the Opera du Rhin at Strasbourg: a jammy job for someone whose performance in this country was so, er, unimpressive.

IN JULY last year the celebrated conductor Sir Colin Davis resigned as president of the London Schools Symphony Orchestra (LSSO) and Foundation for Young Musicians. His reasons weren't made public – but they were very clear from a letter he sent to the Corporation of London.

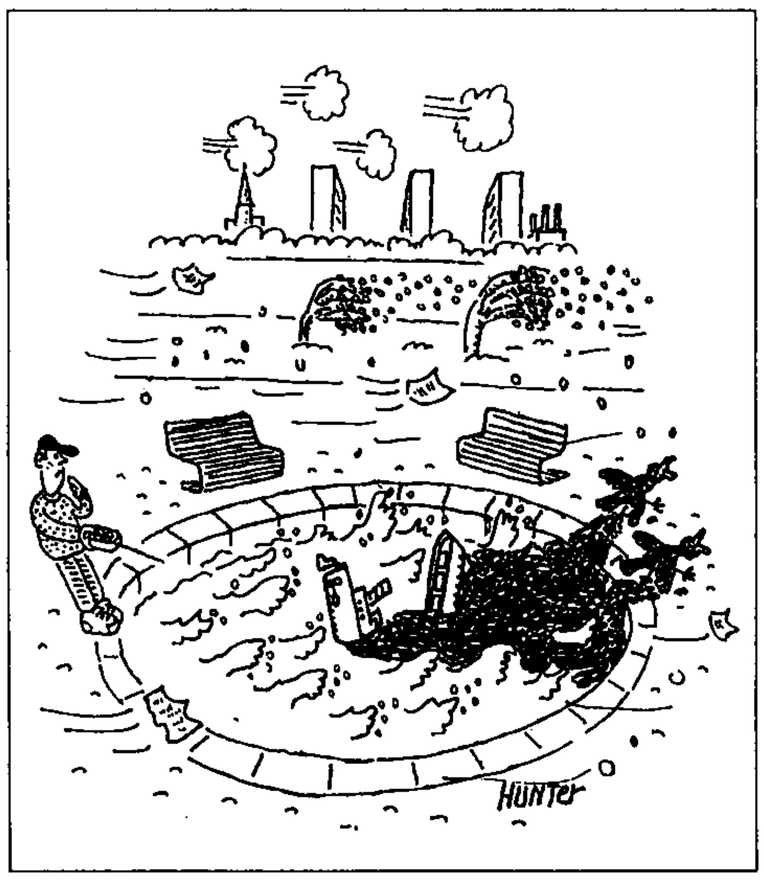
"I am resigning on account of the way my colleague Oliver Butterworth has been treated by those connected with the organisation. It appears that he was suspended on a trumped-up charge, declared innocent and then suspended again on another pretext. There is a witch-hunt going on here to secure the dismissal of a man who had devoted the best years of his life to the LSSO. It is an outrageous and nauseating tactic on the part of some who, knowing nothing about music or musicians, nevertheless wish to secure their own power. The only reason I became connected with the LSSO was through my admiration for Mr Butterworth's work. If he is no longer there I have no inclination to have anything to do with it."

Mr Butterworth, the orchestra's artistic director, has indeed now been sacked – despite his sterling work over the years ensuring the survival of the Centre for Young Musicians (CYM) and the LSSO after the abolition of the Inner London Education Authority and Greater London Council, and the transfer of the administration of CYM and the LSSO to London's "lead council", Westminster.

Tributes to Mr Butterworth abound. In 1999, for instance, he went with the orchestra to Argentina where its performances won universal praise. David Blunkett, then education secretary, wrote a letter of congratulation. In May 2001, however, Mr Butterworth and his wife Julia, who worked for CYM, were suddenly suspended. The reason, set out in an unsigned letter sent to the director of education at Westminster, was that they had made rude remarks about colleagues at a dinner. This was the "trumped-up charge" mentioned by Sir Colin Davis. When the charge was withdrawn, Julia Butterworth was reinstated but Mr Oliver Butterworth was still suspended subject to disciplinary hearings on quite different matters.

At hearings on 2 and 5 November last year, Butterworth answered a series of charges. On every point he was sure he was acting within his job description. He was surprised that the "independent adjudicator" at the hearings was John Harris, Westminster's director of education. Mr Butterworth was sacked for "gross misconduct" and his appeal was rejected. At great expense he is now taking his case for unfair dismissal to an industrial tribunal. In the meantime musical young Londoners have lost a teacher, a conductor and an organiser of exceptional ability and the LSSO has lost its president.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'



DOWN ON THE FARM

MORE on Cambridgeshire farmer Robin Page, who faces a possible charge under the public order act for a speech he made at Frampton countryside fair in September in which, a bit like Prince Charles, he called for the countryside minority to enjoy the same level of rights as one-legged, lorry-driving Moslem vegetarian lesbians, etc.

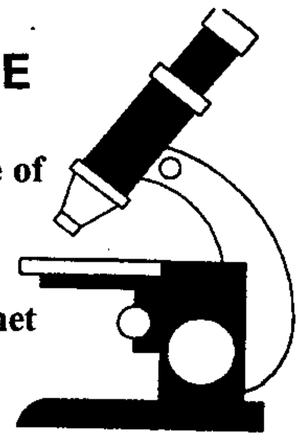
Page also put his foot in it, it seems, when he was invited recently to join Lord Plumb, former president of the NFU, in giving after-dinner speeches to a harvest supper staged by the Cotswold Food Group. On arrival Page was somewhat taken aback to be told that he would only be expected to tell a few dirty jokes.

After Lord Plumb had droned on for 20 minutes, claiming that the problems of British agriculture were all the fault of farmers for failing to respond to the needs of their customers, Page pointed out that it was hardly appropriate to crack jokes when one British farmer is committing suicide every five days. It was hard to agree with Plumb that the problem was caused by farmers failing to meet the needs of the marketplace when 75 percent of that market is dictated by supermarkets, farmers are treated with contempt by the government and receive no support whatever from Lord Plumb's NFU.

As he spoke he noticed a red-faced Plumb scribbling furious notes to the chairman. After a few minutes Page was ordered to stop speaking and sit down. Several guests, including a judge, came up to apologise and to commend his comments. But clearly free speech is no longer very high on the Cotswolds agenda.

'Muckspreader'

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE



A MONSTROUS, multi-headed beast from hell is one of the creatures in the current advertising blitz BT Openworld is using to try to persuade us to take up internet broadband – fast, always-on internet access.

Even Tony Blair has woken up to the fact that our competitors are way ahead and has pledged an extra billion or so to get public services online. (Incredibly, much of the public sector – health services, schools and so on – still relies on dial-up technology to access the internet.)

Sadly, as pointed out here a few weeks back, BT isn't exactly biting the hands off several million potential customers who would like to get online fast. Getting broadband – even if your house is close enough to an exchange – is glacially slow and tortuous. And Oftel's Alice-in-Wonderland rules – designed to promote competition in the 1980s telecoms market – aren't helping. Add to that BT's reluctance to pester people too hard to junk their Victorian (but lucrative) ISDN lines, and it's hard to see broadband growing in numbers any time soon.

It even seems that should there be a sudden freeing up of the ADSL logjam, BT Openworld's customers could be in for a nasty surprise.

A few weeks ago it was revealed that BT's unmetered dial-up service called Anytime should be renamed Some-of-the-time. It seems thousands of BT's customers took the wholly-unreasonable view that a service that sold itself on the fact that you could leave it on all day was just that. Not so, it seems. More than 30,000 people found themselves relegated to a second-rate (slower, prone to crashes and time-outs) service after, er, using their internet connections any time.

Now, the same fate may befall BT's ADSL broadband customers. Remember, the whole point of broadband is that it is on all the time and allows you to download colossal amounts of information in a jiffy. When it is up and running, BT's ADSL is an excellent service. But now it is feared that BT may be planning to penalise so-called "bandwidth hogs" on its ADSL lines. If so, this would completely defeat the point of the exercise. (BT has already threatened some of its satellite broadband users – mostly small businesses who pay an eye-watering £900 to get connected – and told them to go easy on using the service).

Meanwhile stories abound of ADSL connection problems.

But the government is on the case. We even have a special "e-minister" to help us on to the superhighway. His name? Stephen Timms. Can he get broadband at his east London home? Yup. And has he bothered to do so? You guessed it...

'Boffin'

Letters

Depressing Special

Sir,

I was very interested to read M.D.'s article about antidepressants and how they don't work as well as doctors seem to think. I was diagnosed with depression when I was 18 and in the five years since then I've been treated with three different antidepressants, none of which has really worked. In the past year I've tried to kill myself twice by overdosing on these drugs, and my doctor's solution has been to prescribe me more! I was lucky enough to receive psychotherapy after being on a waiting list for 18 months, and then it only lasted for ten weeks. When the therapy finished I had just started talking about what had made me feel so depressed and I was then left to deal with those feelings on my own. I went back to the doctor and told him this and his solution was – you've guessed it – more drugs.

ANONYMOUS.

Sir,

As a sufferer of depression I have been prescribed Seroxat for the last three years. I read with interest that one of the side-effects of taking Seroxat is, er, depression?

(Source reference: www.paxil-side-effects.com)

Yours depressed,
SIMON POWLEY,

Via email.

Sir,

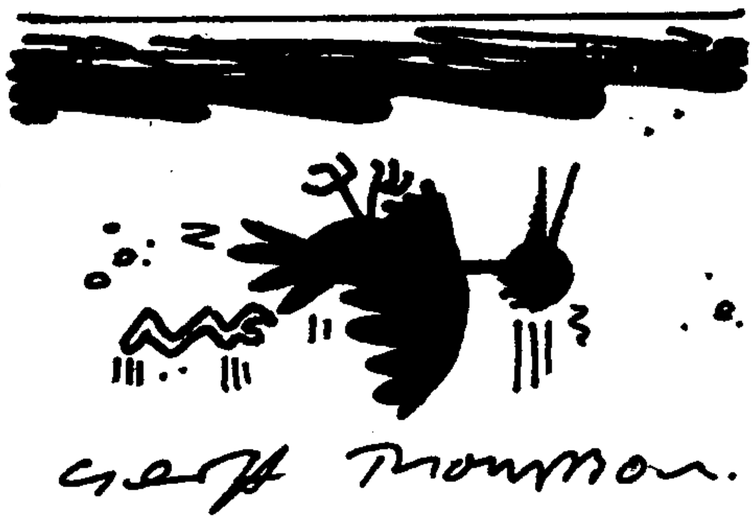
I was heartened to read your Depression Special largely because it contained more accurate information about the "disease" than most academic journals put together. Attempting to study the rationale behind the action of anti-depressants one is struck by the fact that there is no rationale. As your article rightly pointed out, the reason for this could well be that about 75 percent or more of the effect of antidepressants is placebo and consequently not based on the ostensible biochemical action of the drug.

Eye readers may be interested in the work of Dr Irving Kirsch of the University of Connecticut. Dr Kirsch has shown that almost all the effectiveness of antidepressants currently not attributed to the placebo effect are in fact down to a hidden placebo effect. The efficacy of a licensed drug is supposed to be tested in a double-blind clinical trial, the principle behind which is that neither the patients nor the doctors know who is in the placebo group and who is in the trial group. However, because the drug produces easily detectable side effects (whereas the sugar pill placebo does not), patients can in fact easily tell which group they are in. If atropine (which causes antidepressant-like side effects but has no other activity) rather than a sugar pill is used as the placebo, the effectiveness of most antidepressants is reduced to nil.

Yours faithfully,
ROGER FRANKLIN,

Pembroke College, Cambridge.

The Oily Bird Gets The Worm



It's all a fiction

Sir,

There is no truth in Bookworm's piece of gossip that my letter to the TLS had to be rewritten by a "friend" (1067). Either Bookworm made this up or he was told a lie by one of his own friends.

ORLANDO FIGES,

Via email.

Not so dumb

Sir,

The contestant who thought the church in Trafalgar Square is St Martin's-in-the-Wardrobe (Dumb Britain, 1067) may not have been as ignorant as you have inferred. Less than two miles from Trafalgar Square stands the Wren church St Andrew-by-the-Wardrobe, in Queen Victoria Street. Piloti will know all about it.

FRANK PHILLIPS,

Reading.

Lookalike

Dobby **Charles**

Sir,

I was struck by the resemblance of our glorious King-to-be with the equally wonderful fantasy figure of Dobby from Harry Potter. Certainly they both share a masochistic tendency to beat themselves about the head with alarming consistency.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN BROOKS,

London SE23.

IF you enjoy working with people, why not become a mortuary technician?

Dorset Echo

Cruising on the Heath

Sir,

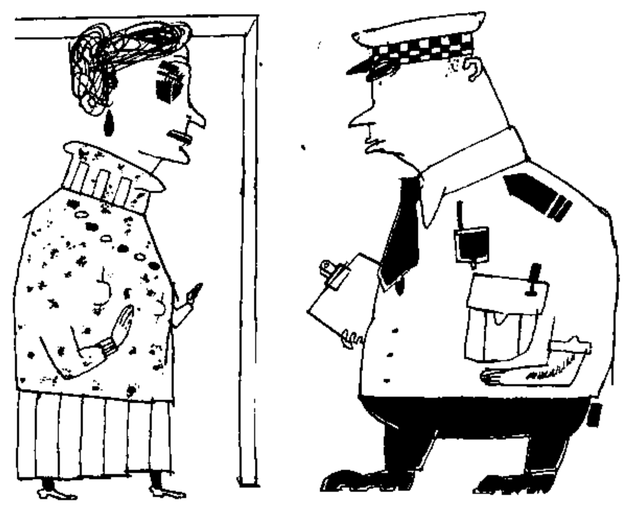
I promised myself that the next time you published a homophobic remark or cartoon I would respond, so here I am objecting to Heath's cartoon (1066) ridiculing the idea of gay men adopting children. In his obsession with what he (presumably) takes to be the obsessions of gay men he seems to betray more about his own anxieties. I realise that the caption is a pun on the fact that cruising is a term used to describe children's movements as they learn to walk (though strictly speaking he gets this wrong, as it entails the child holding on to furniture and other objects to steady themselves – the child in the cartoon seems to be walking unaided) but to conflate this with the slang term for men meeting other men potentially for sex I find crude and offensive, especially as so many people sadly make the mindless equation gay man – seducer/abuser.

It worries me that offensive material of this type is so invisible that its presentation in the Eye goes without censure or even comment.

Regards,
PETER JENNETT,

London.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Just to let you know that we've arrested the man who mugged you this morning, and someone will drop by later with all your things"

The Agog-magogs

Sir,

The Gogmagogs (Music & Musicians, 1067) have never had core funding from the Arts Council so they can hardly have had such funding withdrawn. Like a number of other small musical theatre companies, they have been funded over a number of years on a project-by-project basis. There is currently £63,000 from our National Touring Programme earmarked for their next piece. This will be the largest award they have ever received. As Lunchtime O'Boulez is clearly such a fan of The Gogmagogs' work, I am sure he will be delighted to hear that they have not "collapsed".

The scheme his report referred to is not exactly bizarre. It was set up to allow three companies to share an administrator. This is an efficient way of helping small companies keep down their fixed costs, and two of the three companies are continuing to operate this scheme. If the Gogmagogs believe that an individual employed by them has committed a fraudulent act, they must take evidence of that to the appropriate authorities. They have not as yet shared such evidence with the Arts Council.

Yours sincerely,
KIM EVANS,

Exec Director of Arts, The Arts Council of England.

Sir,

I read in your Music & Musicians section the sad demise of the Gogmagogs performance group, apparently at the hands of the Arts Council.

I rather suspect the real reason for their end is more to do with the fact that their last show was shockingly bad. I had the misfortune of seeing the premiere of "Troy Town", the highlight of which was a girl being poked by a cow with a three foot articulated penis.

I'm sure that cabbies up and down the country will be overjoyed that their hard-squandered lottery cash will no longer sponsor this kind of tawdry bovine pornography.

JEREMY RICHARDSON,

Via email.

Great Scots

Sir,

As one of Muckspreader's "farming chums in Scotland" (ESAs, 1066), the original point (obvious, surely?) is that farmers in Scotland outside ESA zones have clearly not been "ripping up the countryside in the quest for ever greater agricultural production/subsidies" to quote Jason Heath.

Instead they have been farming on as usual and preserving biodiversity as well if not better than some of those farmers working to ESA plans devised by conservation experts. As for more subsidies, these have been progressively reduced since 1992.

And, if I may say so, Scotland is not North Devon.

Yours sincerely,
MRS KIRSTY MACLEOD,

Director, People Too, xana.dubh@ukonline.co.uk

Bragging about spoons

Sir,

Arthur Smith (Letters, 1067) is not alone. According to a feature about Billy Bragg in the Independent (Review, 11 November), "spoons mean a lot to Billy" and "are as high up on his agenda as anything".

PAUL BARBER,

London W9.

Gentle dig

Sir,

With reference to your discussion of Professor John Hunter and forensic archaeology (1067), the Suzy Lamplugh case was not a "frustrating failure" for him, it was one for me. While he did some of the preliminary work, I accompanied the Metropolitan Police search teams as a forensic archaeologist in the field. My role was not to do a "needle-in-a-haystack" search but to save police time. They were acting on information received to search specific areas using police, not archaeological, techniques. My job was threefold: to excavate sites which the police identified as potential burial sites; to identify bones as animal (as opposed to human), thereby saving the exhibit officer from recording them and sending them to a laboratory for identification; and to apply archaeological knowledge to the areas which were stripped by machine so that they did not either miss potential burials or spend time and effort overdigging. At the end of the operation we received a message of grateful thanks from the Lamplugh family, who preferred something to be done rather than nothing, even if it ended in failure.

Yours,
ROBIN WROE-BROWN,

Senior Archaeologist, Museum of London Archaeology Service.

No shit!

Sir,

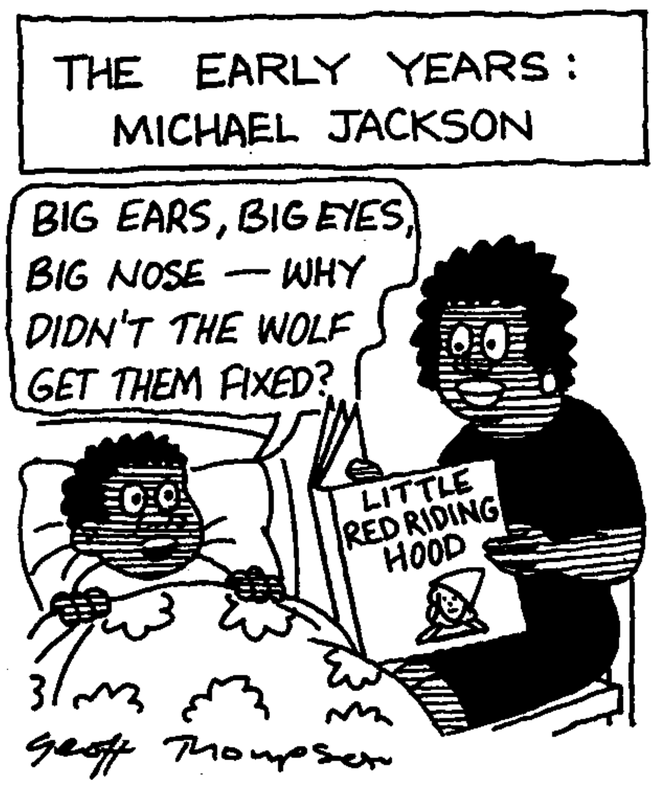
As a retired engineer I was interested in the recent correspondence regarding the problem of sewage sludge (Letters, 1066).

Recently I visited an old friend in Denmark who kindly showed me round his state-of-the-art sewage works! They process much of their effluent, both domestic and industrial, by anaerobic digestion. This essentially is a process involving the breakdown of waste under low oxygen conditions in a steel tank. A special cocktail of bacteria break down both organic matter and chemicals, including pesticides and detergents, cutting fluids harmlessly. The result is an inert non-reactive material which they incorporate into road building aggregate, and vast amounts of methane gas, making the town of Aahrus self-sufficient in energy.

This is indeed cast iron proof that "where there's muck there's brass"!

Yours sincerely,
ROBERT JOHNSON,

Oxford.


THE EARLY YEARS: MICHAEL JACKSON
BIG EARS, BIG EYES, BIG NOSE — WHY DIDN'T THE WOLF GET THEM FIXED?
LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD
Geoff Thompson

Complete Bowles

Sir,

Allow me to be the first of many more thousands to correct Mr Fletcher regarding Conservative Students youth favourite, Tomorrow Belongs to Me.

Whilst the song is from Cabaret, a distinctly anti-nazi musical written in 1966 (as any fule kno), the song was based on a traditional German folk song taken up by the Nazi regime. Fred Ebb wrote new lyrics and John Kander reworked the music which I believe was taken from "Die Wacht am Rhein". This contributes greatly to the resonance of the song.

Best regards,
IAIN COWDEN,

London SW15.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"I didn't see the point of hiding a bushel under a carpet..."
MEL B.
(Wil Hepworth)

"We have to roll up our sleeves and get our knees dirty..."
HOWARD WILKINSON, Radio 5 Live
(Malcolm Macleod)

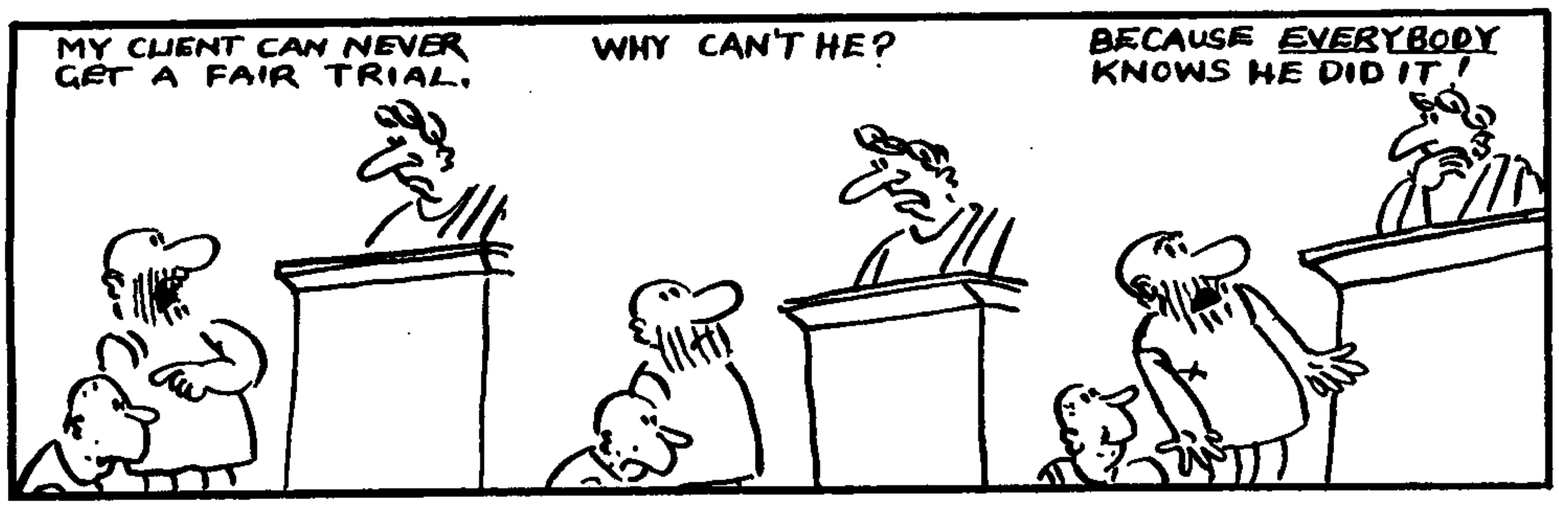
"Liverpool are currently halfway through an unbeaten twelve-match run."
ALAN PARRY, SKY TV
(D. Evans))

"We don't do things by halves on this show. Here is the third movement of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 4."
LISA DUNCOMBE, ClassicFM
(Alan Firminger)

"The longer the game went on, you got the feeling that neither side really wanted to lose."
MARK LAWRENSON, BBC1
(Jonathan Bramall)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN



Letter from **Lubumbashi**

from Our Own Correspondent

WE learned of what amounted to a coup d'etat from a notorious gossip in the Park Hotel. The most powerful "tontons" in the Democratic Republic of Congo had been suspended by our boy wonder president, Joseph Kabila.

Out went security minister Mwenze Kongolo, presidency minister Katumba Mwanke, planning minister General Kalume Numbi and spy chief Kazadi Nyembwe. And in comes... Well, no one is exactly sure. The best clue is the arrival in town of several well-guarded Angolan and South African business types following the hasty departure of our Zimbabwean military brothers bearing large parcels of gem diamonds.

The suspension of the four worst "pilleurs" of the regime and the departure of some of their collaborators occasioned much rejoicing here. "Lubum" is a mining city and Mwenze and Katumba had been sharing out concessions too freely with their Zimbabwean and Belgian pals. We were too polite to complain until a UN investigation revealed that some $5bn of our mineral assets have been discreetly relocated from our beleaguered state mining companies to a group of private companies whose shares are held by Ministers Mwenze, Katumba and Kalume and associates.

The latest theory here is that all these assets will be yanked back from the departing ministers and their allies to be auctioned again to the thronging Angolans and South Africans. After four years of what anyone with a US visa calls "Africa's world war", we tell ourselves the only way is up. But then we said that when Joseph's father, corpulent rebel leader Laurent-Desire Kabila, toppled Mobutu Sese Seko in 1997.

After three unhappy years at the helm, Laurent-Desire was shot in the ear by a bodyguard and spirited off to Zimbabwe to expire. At his funeral in Kinshasa a week later, three Zimbabwe Air Force Chinese F7 fighter jets crashed into each other and 30-year-old Joseph emerged as leader of Africa's newest dynasty. Smiling sweetly and speaking wisely, Joseph was nevertheless held prisoner by the tontons. Unable to drive the Rwandan and Ugandan "pilleurs" from the east, and unwilling to stop our Zimbabwean allies from pillaging the south, we wondered what was the point of Joseph.

Always semi-detached from Congo, Lubum seemed to be heading for total divorce. Our city and its mineral-rich hinterland of Katanga have come under the sway of a military-business cabal. Swaggerer-in-chief is New Zealander, turned Belgian, turned Congolese commercant George Forrest. Moustachioed George is also France's honorary consul in Lubum and renowned for his Bastille Day parties. Sensibly he joined the same freemason's lodge as Belgian foreign minister and Congo aficionado Louis Michel.

Formerly Mobutu's bag man and military supplier, Monsieur George now pledges allegiance to the Kabila dynasty, and in Katanga has helped America's OM Group scoop up a $2bn stockpile of germanium, a rare metal used in communication satellites. As you drive into Lubum from the south, you can't miss George's giant blue oven coughing acrid smoke into the sky. Funny that after a private meeting with George in his Lubum mansion, Belgian senate investigators concluded that his business ethics were entirely proper – in the Congolese context.

Deputy chief swaggerer is military and tobacco salesman John Bredenkamp, who's hoovered up a billion dollars of cobalt reserves in Katanga for a $400,000 down payment to his political pals in Kinshasa – on top of his $15m spent so far on extraction. Thirty years ago he was busting UN sanctions to keep Ian Smith in planes to bomb rebel positions in Rhodesia. Now he calls himself Zimbabwean, does business with Mugabe's army, operates his businesses out of Britain, sells British Aerospace (BAE Systems) military kit and is Lady Thatcher's neighbour in Mayfair. It seems your prime minister Tony Blair's indignation against Mugabe's carpetbaggers is a trifle selective.

● **ON SALE NOW – The best-selling Colemanballs 11**

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "In a Japanese house, the only place you can be alone and sit quietly is in the place of easement," Masahiro Iguchi told reporters in Nara, Japan. "Because of that, and because Japan is a nation famously addicted to gadgetry, there is a growing market for ever more elaborate toilet products, and we are striving to meet it."

Iguchi, marketing chief of the sanitary product manufacturers Inax, was commenting on the toilet wars which have raged in Japan throughout this year. "They began in February when engineers from the Matsushita company introduced a seat equipped with electrodes that send a mild charge through the user's buttocks, yielding a digital measurement of body fat. We at Inax counter-attacked with a toilet that plays koto music, glows in the dark, and lifts up its lid when the infrared sensor detects a human being approaching. And other companies have produced toilets that can measure blood sugar level and toilet smell, heat up or cool down the room, or massage the user with water jets. Toilets with automatic jet sprays can now be found in half of all Japanese homes, which is more than contain personal computers.

"You may think that a toilet is just a toilet, but we would like to make a toilet a home health-measuring centre. We are going to install devices to measure weight, fat, blood pressure, heartbeat, urine sugar, albumin, and blood in urine. One day, these smart toilets will be able to monitor every bowel movement in the country through a central computer, and that is an inspiring thought." *(New York Times* and *Toronto Globe and Mail, 18/10/02. Spotter: Wallace Brown)*

—●—

● *"I am the victim in all this, not the guilty party," a man known only as Rafas told a court in Tehran, "because I fell prey to a confidence trick. I had recently been to see a holy man, because I was looking for a way to get rich. He told me that if I paid him five million rials, he would give me a magic parchment that would make me invisible. So I did, and he gave me the parchment and a magic chant to recite, which goes 'Um Du Jum Gee Samm Illy Kecko'. But it now seems to me that I was tricked, and that the holy man took advantage of my trusting nature."*

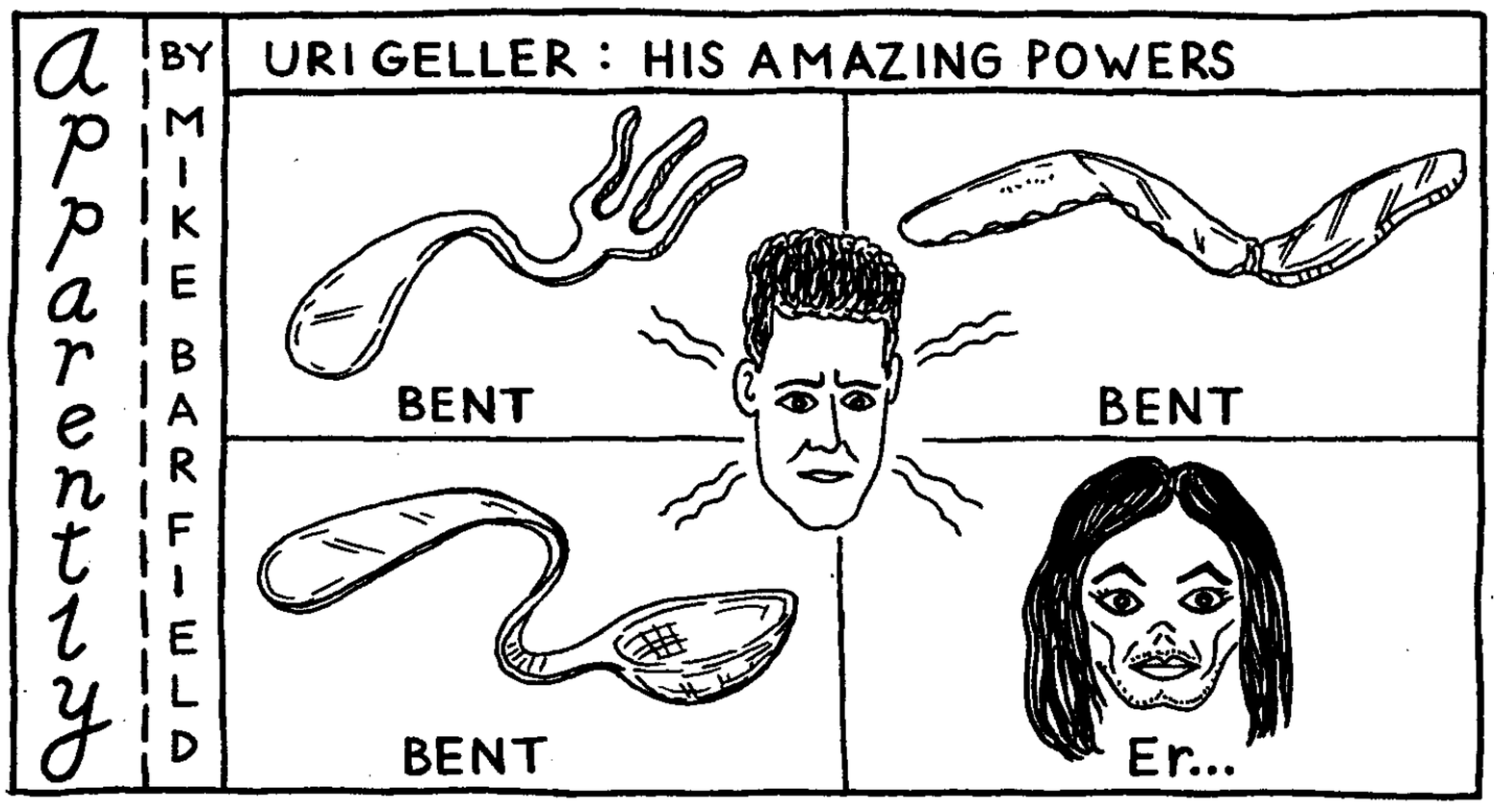
Earlier, the judge had heard from the man's defence counsel, who explained how Rafas had attempted to rob a bank in Tehran. "Bank staff were astonished to see the defendant stride calmly into the bank, jump over the counter, and begin to help himself to large quantities of money. He carried no weapon, just a large bag and his magic parchment. He kept repeating the phrase 'Um Du Jum Gee Samm Illy Kecko', and he seemed genuinely to believe that he was invisible. He was quickly and easily overpowered, but it took him several days to accept that everybody could see him, whether he carried his parchment and recited his mantra or not." (Jam-e-Jam [Iran], 7/11/02. Spotter: C. Du Plessis)

—●—

● "Cathay Pacific staff became concerned about the activities of the three men shortly after boarding took place," a spokesman for Charles de Gaulle airport told reporters in Paris. "They were carrying strange-looking documents and taking turns to lock themselves in the restroom

before the Hong Kong flight took off. When a stewardess checked the cubicle, she noted drops of a suspicious white liquid on the floor and, fearing that it might be Semtex, and that an act of terrorism might be underway, called the airport police.

"After investigation, we have satisfied ourselves that no act of terrorism was planned. The three men were sailors from the island of Kiribati, and were returning home after a long spell at sea. The documents carried by the men in fact contained pornographic material, and this appears to have been the reason that they were hurrying to visit the toilet, again and again. And I probably don't need to tell you that the suspicious white liquid was not Semtex. Members of the crew were utterly disgusted." *(Sydney Morning Herald, 13/11/02. Spotter: Nick Mattlock)*



WAS CHURCHILL THE MOST EVIL MAN OF THE 20TH CENTURY?

by **Sir Hitler Hastings**

A LEADING German historian has produced new evidence to suggest that wartime leader Winston Churchill was guilty of some of the most serious crimes ever committed.

Hitherto unpublished wartime documents show that Churchill:

● **deliberately ordered the mass-bombing of German cities in which millions of women and children were murdered.**

● **gave instructions that German U-Boats should be sunk on sight.**

● **was responsible for starting the war in order to further his long-standing ambition to become prime minister of Britain.**

In his new book, 'Churchill Worse Than Hitler', Professor Wolfgang Bullschitte claims that the so-called "London Blitz" never took place and was simply a fabrication of "Churchill's lie machine".

"When the Luftwaffe flew over London in 1940, the only intention of Herr Goering's pilots was to drop bags of sweets to Britain's starving children," the professor explains.

Shock

"This was used by the warmonger Churchill as his excuse for killing millions of German civilians as they slept innocently in their beds."

But last night British historian Sir David Irving accused his German colleague of "outrageous plagiarism".

"All these ideas are simply copied out of my own book 'Churchill Worse Than Hitler', published in 1965 and now accepted as the only true record of what happened in World War Two, when Germany stood alone against the armed might of Britain's hated and feared Home Guard led by their evil mastermind Captain Mainwaring and his ruthless henchmen Jones and Fraser," said Irving.

TV Highlights

Great Britons

No. 94 **Spigismond Topes**

TONIGHT Liverpool-born actor Alan Nargs puts the case for 20th century pop icon Spiggy Topes as the greatest Briton of all time.

Nargs singles out Spiggy's idealism, iconoclasm and ibuprofen as the defining qualities of "the man who changed Britain from black-and-white into colour".

Nargs argues that the Turds' album *'Love is The Thing, Hate Isn't'* single-handedly brought an end to the Vietnam war and ushered in a new era of world peace that will "last for 1000 years".

TOMORROW: Princess Diana nominates Mo Mowlam – "Her touchy-feely style changed Britain forever."

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

I expect some of you have heard by now of my recent supposed "stand-up row" with Cardinal Chirac, my French colleague on the Council of the Ecumenical Union (EU).

All sorts of stories have been circulating round the parish. What I said to him. What he said to me.

Heavens above! If I believed half of what they're all saying about me, I wouldn't be fit to be your vicar!

The latest bit of tittle-tattle, I gather, is that the Cardinal took me to task at one of our meetings about all the support I've been giving to our good friend the Rev. Dubya of the Church of the Latter-Day Morons.

Mr Chirac is meant to have said to me, "Tell me, Votre Reverence, what are you going to tell your petit garçon Leo when he asks you 'Papa, what did you do in ze war?' Will you tell him zat you helped to start it?"

And what's really ridiculous is that people are now saying that I didn't have any reply to what the Cardinal was saying!!!

Hey, have you ever known your vicar be stumped for words, and not be able to come up with a devastating reply?

Let me tell you what I would have said to our French friend, if he'd said the things that he didn't (and fortunately Mr Campbell was there and has been able to give me a complete transcript!).

Firstly, I would have said to Mr Chirac that we should all be pretty ashamed of ourselves if we were not prepared to stand up and be counted in the war against evil, wherever it raises its head.

For, as the Rev. Dubya has written in his last "Letter to the Briton-ians", which I received only this morning, "Rev. Bloop, you are verily the rock on which I will build my missile site."

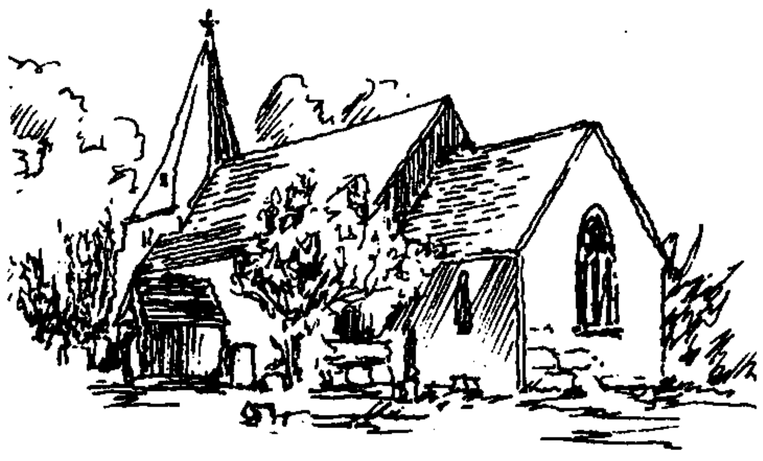
And that's only the first thing I would have said to the Cardinal.

The second thing I told him, "I don't think we need any lessons from Frenchmen about cowardice in wartime, do we Cardinal Vichy?"

I then reminded him of what had happened at various points in history, when Britain had to save his countrymen from our German friends, at which point Cardinal Petain became a trifle hot under the collar!

He called me "mal-élevé", which is the French for "a bad pupil", obviously referring to my only too accurate recall of history!

And, lastly, as to his very rude and uncalled-for reference to my son Leo, I had



to ask him "and what, Jacques, will you be telling all your various love-children to explain why you ran up the white flag even before the first shot was fired in World War Three?"

Of course, I must underline that all of this was completely off-the-record and never took place, and Cardinal Chirac and I are the very best of friends and always will be.

But all I can say is that when the great day comes, and the trumpet shall sound, and the Rev. Dubya is there leading his legions of righteousness against the crumbling walls of Babylon (the letters of which, incidentally, represent the "Number of the Beast", Rev Dubya tells me), all I can say is that when that Last Great Battle is joined, I would sincerely hope that certain people whose names I would not wish to mention are not found running in the wrong direction!

In which spirit, I have composed a special hymn to be sung at next Sunday's evening service, to the tune of "The Battle Hymn of The Alliance".

"Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord,
He is trampling down the silos where the weapons of mass destruction are stored,
He is standing up for values that we all must applaud,
Our truth goes marching on.
Glory, glory to Rev. Dubya
(twice more)
And his truth goes marching on."

Words and music T. Blair 2002.

Yours in the Lord,

Tony

Vicar and Commander-in-Chief.

Parish Postbag

Dear Sir,

The Vicar's idea that kids should pay for their own tuition fees is one of the daftest that I have ever

Yours sincerely,
Mrs C. Short,
Loose Cannon Street.

The Editor reserves the right to cut all letters, particularly if they are from Mrs Short.

Thought for the Week

From Mrs Hodge, co-chair of the Board of Governors of St Albion College

"Why should the dustman subsidise useless graduates like ourselves?"

(Is this right? A.C.)

BOOK-SIGNING

IT WAS regrettable that there was such a poor turnout for Mr Birt, after he had generously agreed to sign copies of his new book in the Church Hall last Thursday. In fact, nobody came at all. This was very bad manners to a good friend of the Vicar's, who has done a lot of good in the parish with his "blue skies thinking". His idea that we should have nothing but blue sky from now on is a very good one and not to be laughed at! What was particularly unfortunate was that Mrs Jowell had made some doubtless delicious GM mince pies and non-alcoholic mulled wine to celebrate the occasion, and this all had to be thrown away. A.C.

Yes, It's 'VIRTUAL ST ALBION'S'!!!

The 'e-parish of tomorrow'

ALASTAIR CAMPBELL WRITES:

The children of St Albion's primary school were highly enthusiastic last week when the Vicar came to assembly to announce his exciting plans to make St Albion's a wholly 'e-parish' by 2015.

"I have a dream," the Vicar told pupils, "of a parish in which every child can be connected to the internet 24 hours a day.

"Furthermore," he said, "I'm going to let you into a little secret. In future, people won't have to come to boring old church any more on Sundays, because they will get access to the whole service live on-screen.

"This will make the idea of worship tremendously exciting and relevant to young people like you." So let's do it, shall we?

The Vicar then "practised what he preached" by "logging on" and then typing in the word "Schoolchildren".

It all went very well, except that unfortunately the only site which came up featured pictures of Asian teenagers with the heading "Dirty Des's Hot Lolita's".

At this point, Mr Clarke, the new chairman of the governors, interposed his not inconsiderable bulk between the pupils and the screen and proposed a "vote of thanks" to the Vicar, thus saving the day!

● **ON SALE NOW – Carry On Vicar! St Albion Parish News Book Five**

NOISY COUGH SHOCK

by Our Radio Correspondent **Benny Lin**

THE CONSERVATIVE leader, Mr Iain Duncan Cough, yesterday astonished listeners when, on the Radio Four programme *Desert Island Discs,* he denied being "a quiet man".

Raising his voice to a whisper Cough lashed out at "the idiot" who had accused him of being the quiet man.

"Whoever said that," Mr Cough told presenter Sue Linctus, "should have kept quiet."

Charles Aznovoice

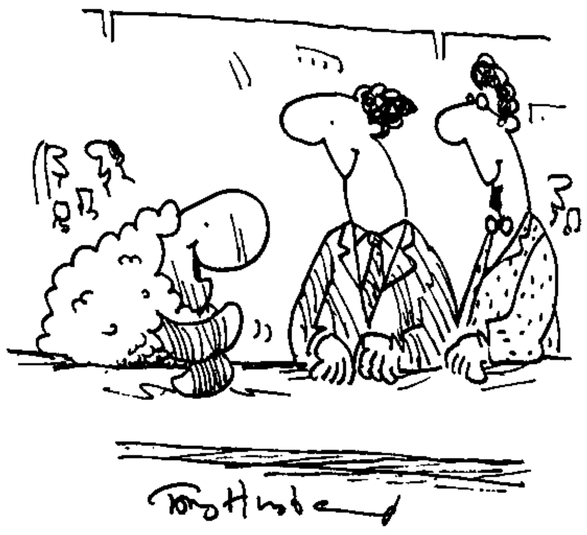
As listeners turned up the volume on their sets to catch his words, Cough explained that he would feel quite at home marooned on a desert island, as it would be like the Conservative Party with no one there except himself.

Late News

COUGH VOTED QUIETEST BRITON

IAIN DUNCAN COUGH was last night voted the quietest Briton in history, narrowly beating TV's Sooty, Gromit the Dog and Raymond Briggs' Snowman *(Reuters).*

"Well, Professor, we've done it... created a super-intelligent sheep. What can I get you?"



"No, let me get these!"

GLENDA SLAGG

FLEET STREET'S MISS WORD (GEDDIT???)

■ **MISS WORLD??!?! Miss Third World more like!! Well, I'm going to give it a miss??! (Geddit???!) Who needs this meat market of scantily-dressed flesh for dirty old men to sit around a-leerin' and a-sneerin'??!? The whole thing stinks!!? No wonder the muslims of Nigeria showed their distaste by burning down churches and murdering everyone?!?! Hats off to them for showing commonsense and trying to bring the world into the 21st century!!?!?!**

■ HATS and bikinis off to the plucky contestants of Miss World!!?!! They weren't going to be cowed by a bunch of mad muslims a-shootin' and a-lootin'!!?!?! These gals stood firm (Geddit!!?!) as they showed what us girls can do to make the world a better place and stop the fun-killing fundamentalists (Geddit??!) from dragging us back into the Middle Ages!!?! I wouldn't **miss** it for the world!!?!?!

■ *THREE CHEERS for plucky Princess Anne, the only Royal who had the guts to stand up in court and take her punishment!!? Unlike her gutless brother Charles who preferred to skulk behind Mummy's petticoats whilst Royal Butler Paul Burrell was thrown to the* ***dogs****!?!?! (Geddit???!) The Princess Royal stood in the dock noble, dignified and guilty. God bless you, Ma'am!??!*

■ **PRINCESS ANNE – £500??!? What kind of fine is that for a woman whose dog ate a toddler??!? What kind of justice is that???! The Princess should have been put down – along with her dotty dog!?!? As I always say, "It's one law for the bitch..."!?!?! (Geddit???)**

HERE they are, Glenda's Yuletide Yummies!!!?!

● **Daniel Deronda** – OK, so he's fictional but so's my sex life!?!

● **Andrew Marr** – They call him Big Ears!!?! I wonder what else is big??!? Geddit!?!?!

● **Andy Gilchrist, General Secretary of the Fire Brigades' Union** – I've got a fire that needs quenchin' Big Boy – so bring your hose round. Geddit!!?!?!

Byeeee!!!

Public Information Announcement

IN CASE OF FIRE, TRY NOT TO BE BURNED TO DEATH

The following tips were issued by Mr John Prescott on behalf of the government, in order to assist public safety during the firefighters' industrial action.

1. Do not get a can of petrol, spray it around the house and throw your lighted cigarette onto it.

2. Do not turn on the gas under a chip pan and go on holiday.

3. Do not give your toddler a flamethrower to play with.

4. If you are an arsonist, please try and control yourself for the duration of the emergency.

5. If you suffer from spontaneous combustion, wear an asbestos suit and stand in the garden.

6. Do not set fire to this notice.

If you require further information, visit www.bleeding.obvious.gov.uk

FIRE KILLS
YOU CAN PREVENT IT

BLUNKETT CRACKS DOWN ON SEX

by Our Legal Correspondent Phil Briefs

THE Home Secretary, Mr David Blunkett, introduced new legislation today to outlaw all sexual intercourse except between consenting men in public places.

Speaking at Clapham Common, Mr Blunkett said, "My new law will put an end once and for all to the threat to women from men who, as research has shown, are all convicted rapists."

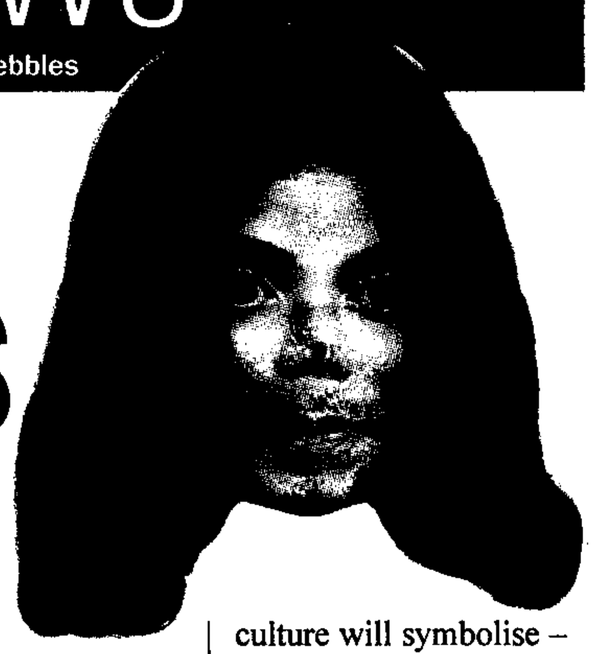
Said one critic of the new bill, Ms Deirdre Spart, "David Blunkett is a typical male, ie trying to force women to accept him despite clear evidence that they have said no and er... *(cont. p. 94)*

FIRE TALKS BREAK-THROUGH

AZTEC NEWS

Friday 29 November 1520 3 pebbles

HORROR MASK GOES ON SHOW



by Our Art Correspondent
Quetzal Letts

A TERRIFYING human mask, dating from 2002 AD, goes on show today at the Teotihuacan Modern in Mexico City.

Said curator Hugh Montezuma-Massingberd, "This blood-curdling image will give the Aztec world a horrifying glimpse of the barbaric civilisation that is due to exist in 600 years' time."

"Jacko", the god of eternal youth and money, will be worshipped by millions of young people, some of whom will be sacrificed to him by their parents.

PYRAMID OF THE MOONWALK

He will often be depicted holding up human babies by one leg, as if he is about to dash their brains out or eat them.

The black god will also be known for his miraculous trans-formation into a white man.

Said Massingberd, "He is an icon of everything that this culture will symbolise – greed, excess, savagery and a lack of nose. The face of Jacko will haunt all visitors to the exhibition for years to come."

Huge queues are already forming to see what has been described as "the most frightening sight in human history".

On Other Pages

Your Mule Trains Tonight **7**

In The Cortes **6**

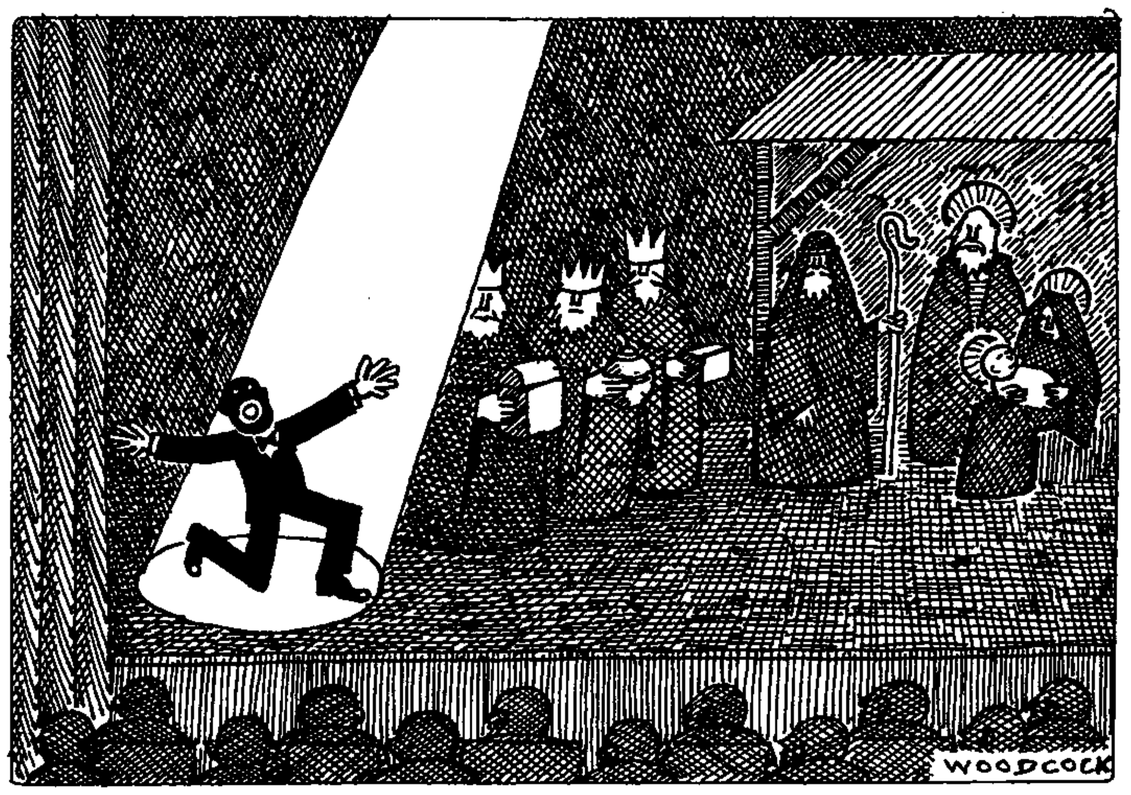
Advertisement

Kentucky Fried Chichenitza

Try Our Humanburgers

- They're Bloody Good!

"Ah, yes – you're the boy who wants to be a pimp"



POLLY FILLER

THE SIGHT of Michael Jackson dangling his baby out of a top floor window will come as no surprise to the millions of mothers of this world who are all too familiar with fatherly incompetence.

So Wacko went further than most Dads but, in the useless stakes, my partner Simon comes a close second.

Who can forget the time that selfish Simon left our baby in the cloakroom of Soho House so he could go off and find a big screen showing Celebrity Penguin Baiting from Buenos Aires on Sky Bad One, introduced by Jeremy Clarkson and AA Gill?

Or the time when he gave Baby Charlie a beer so that he would sleep through Men and Motormowers on Granada Sad Two, introduced by AA Clarkson and Jeremy Gill?

Or the time *(Haven't we read all this in your amusing Book of Collected Columns 'Mummy For Old Rope'? Ed.)*

ANYWAY, the fact is that men are mentally ill-equipped to look after children, being selfish, stupid and unable to focus on more than one thing at a time – that one thing usually being the television, probably showing Lap Dancing from Lapland on Channel Phwoar, introduced by Jeremy Gillson and AA Clark.

And the only reason that Simple Simon hasn't been photographed holding Charlie upside down from the top of a luxury hotel is because he doesn't earn enough money and he's not famous! Which means he has to rely on, guess what, a more successful partner who happens to be a woman. Typ-ic-al!!

The fact *is* that our children are far too precious to be entrusted to their careless fathers. There is only one person who knows instinctively how to look after a child properly – and that is the nanny.

© Polly Filler 2002.

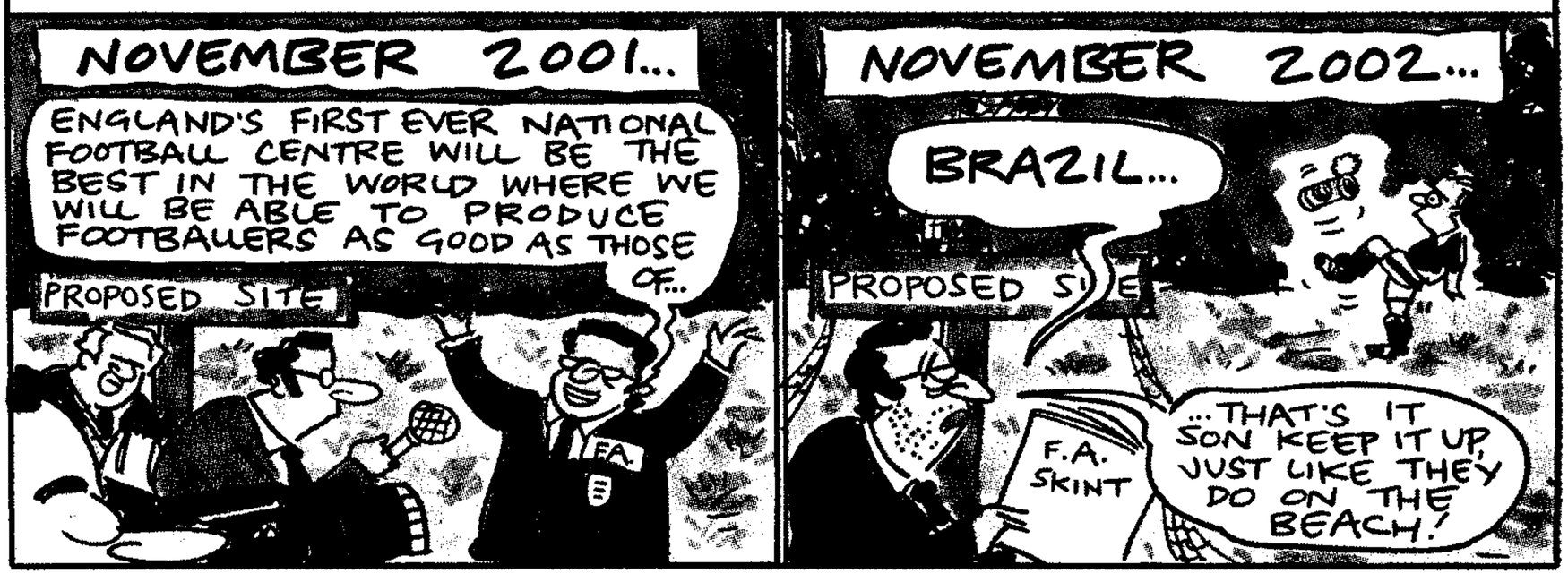
Thought For The Gay

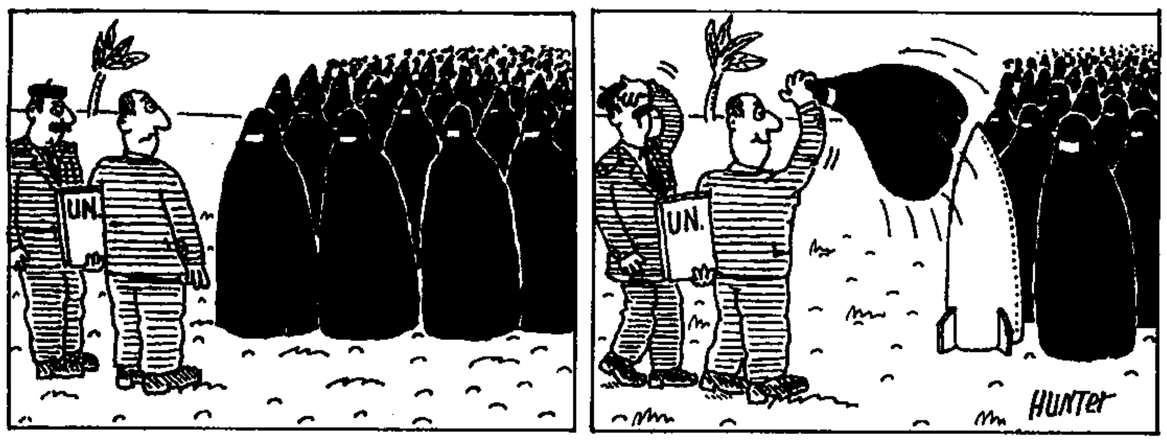
by Cardinal Dirtymac Murphy O'Connor

Well, you know, in those days it was all very different and, er, our understanding of the nature of, you know, was a bit well... and Father Ped seemed a good chap and... look, what I'm saying is why don't we forget about the whole thing and maybe talk about a cheque to cover your expenses...
(continued for far too long)

the PREMIERSH*TS

PAUL WOOD

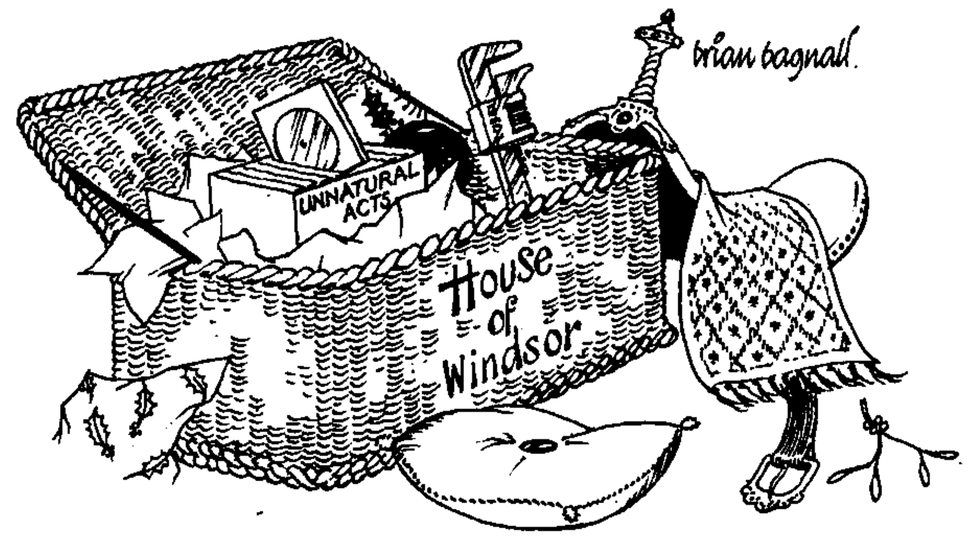

NOVEMBER 2001...
ENGLAND'S FIRST EVER NATIONAL FOOTBALL CENTRE WILL BE THE BEST IN THE WORLD WHERE WE WILL BE ABLE TO PRODUCE FOOTBALLERS AS GOOD AS THOSE OF...
PROPOSED SITE
F.A.
NOVEMBER 2002...
BRAZIL...
PROPOSED SITE
F.A. SKINT
...THAT'S IT SON KEEP IT UP, JUST LIKE THEY DO ON THE BEACH!



Advertisement

CHRISTMAS GIFTS

From The Great House Of Windsor Sale



Make it a Christmas to remember with a special Royal Gift for your loved ones. Look at these amazing offers.

★ Jewel-encrusted camel saddle bearing the legend *'A gift from the Emir of Omarsharif'* **£357.99**

★ Silver-plated monkey wrench inscribed *'To Charles and Diana from the loyal people of Huddersfield'* **£25 (ono)**

★ An after-dinner mint presented to Prince Charles on the occasion of the Royal Jubilee Dinner at the Ritz **£19.33**

★ Set of audiotapes detailing a series of unnatural acts performed by various members of Prince Charles' staff **£1.3 million**

And there's much, much more in this incredible Christmas bonanza from the House of Windsor – cheap is our middle name!!

Hurry, hurry, hurry whilst Royal Family lasts!

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam James Coburn, film actor

So. Farewell
Then James
Coburn.

Yes, we remember
You – the thin
One who threw
The knives in
The Magnificent Seven.

What a great film.
And what a
Theme tune.

Dum. Di-da-da-dum.
Dum. Di-da-da-dum.

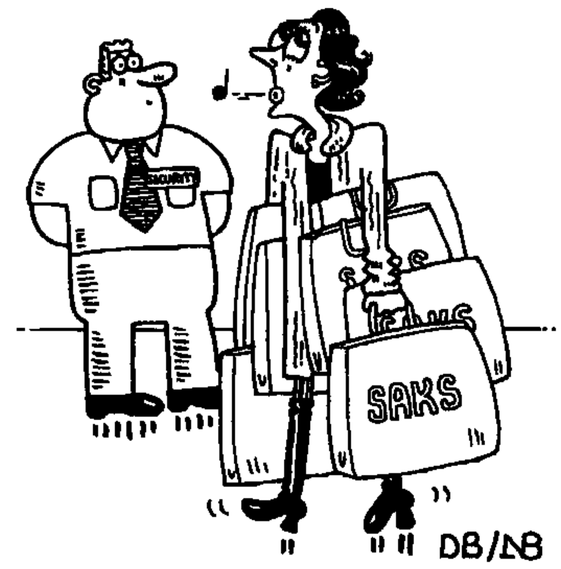
Then

Da-da
Di-da-DA-da.

Unfortunately I do not
Have the space
To reproduce
The entire
Score.

E. J. Thribb
(The Magnificent
Seventeen-and-a-half)

NEW OLD SAYINGS



Winona takes it all

EYE FEMAIL

Do Young Women Write Too Much?

Asks Victoria Coren

A SURVEY reveals that more and more young women are writing worrying numbers of columns in the national press. I know this only too well as someone who began writing what I thought were "occasional" pieces for the papers.

But then the habit became more demanding, and I found myself writing more and more. Nowadays I can happily get through anything up to five or six pieces a day – the Standard, the Guardian, the Mail, the Telegraph, the Observer, even the Independent, for God's sake!

It got so bad that at one time I seriously thought about giving up and making porn films but *(Continued in 94 other papers.)*

TOMORROW: Why men are all pathetic bores who generalise about women.

HINDLEY STILL DEAD

by Our Crime Staff
Lunchtime O'Ghoul

THE WORLD's most evil woman is still dead.

Although it is now ten days since Myra Hindley cheated justice by dying, there are no signs that her crimes have lost their awful fascination for the editors of Britain's tabloid newspapers.

Saddleworth Moor

Today is the anniversary of the historic article I wrote yesterday, in which I gave a truly harrowing account of my visit to the bleak moors where Hindley shocked the conscience of mankind only 40 short years ago.

Words cannot express the deep sense of revulsion *(continued page 94)*

On Other Pages

- Pics of dead children **10-16**
- Pics of Hindley living life of luxury in prison **17**
- Did Hindley kill Longford? *asks Simon Heffer* **18**
- Should death penalty be restored for David Yelland? *asks Richard Littlejohn* **19**
- Myra didn't fool me, says Glenda Slagg **20**
- What is evil? *asks top philosopher Roger Screwtop* **21**

HINDLEY TO LIE IN STATE

IN RESPONSE to overwhelming public demand, the coffin of the late Myra Hindley is to lie in state in the Millennium Dome for seven days, so that members of the public will have a chance to pay their last disrespects to the most evil woman who ever lived.

Inspector Knacker, who is in charge of the arrangements for this historic national occasion, said, "We are hoping that over one million members of the public will file through the Dome in a dignified manner, to spit on the coffin or to leave a suitable tribute of cellophane-wrapped ordure."

There will also be a chance for visitors to sign a special Book of Condemnation, sponsored by the Sun newspaper, in which people can record what they would have done to Hindley if she had been let out alive.

At the four corners of the catafalque a tabloid journalist will maintain a silent vigil in honour of the woman who provided forty years' worth of voyeuristic copy for very little work *(Surely none? Ed.)*

JOIN THE TWO-MINUTE NOISE FOR MYRA

THE Sun will be marking the death of the World's Most Evil Woman with two minutes of noise. Readers all over the country are asked to join in by shouting "Rot in Hell!" (or similar sentiment) at eleven o'clock today.

Friday November 29 2002

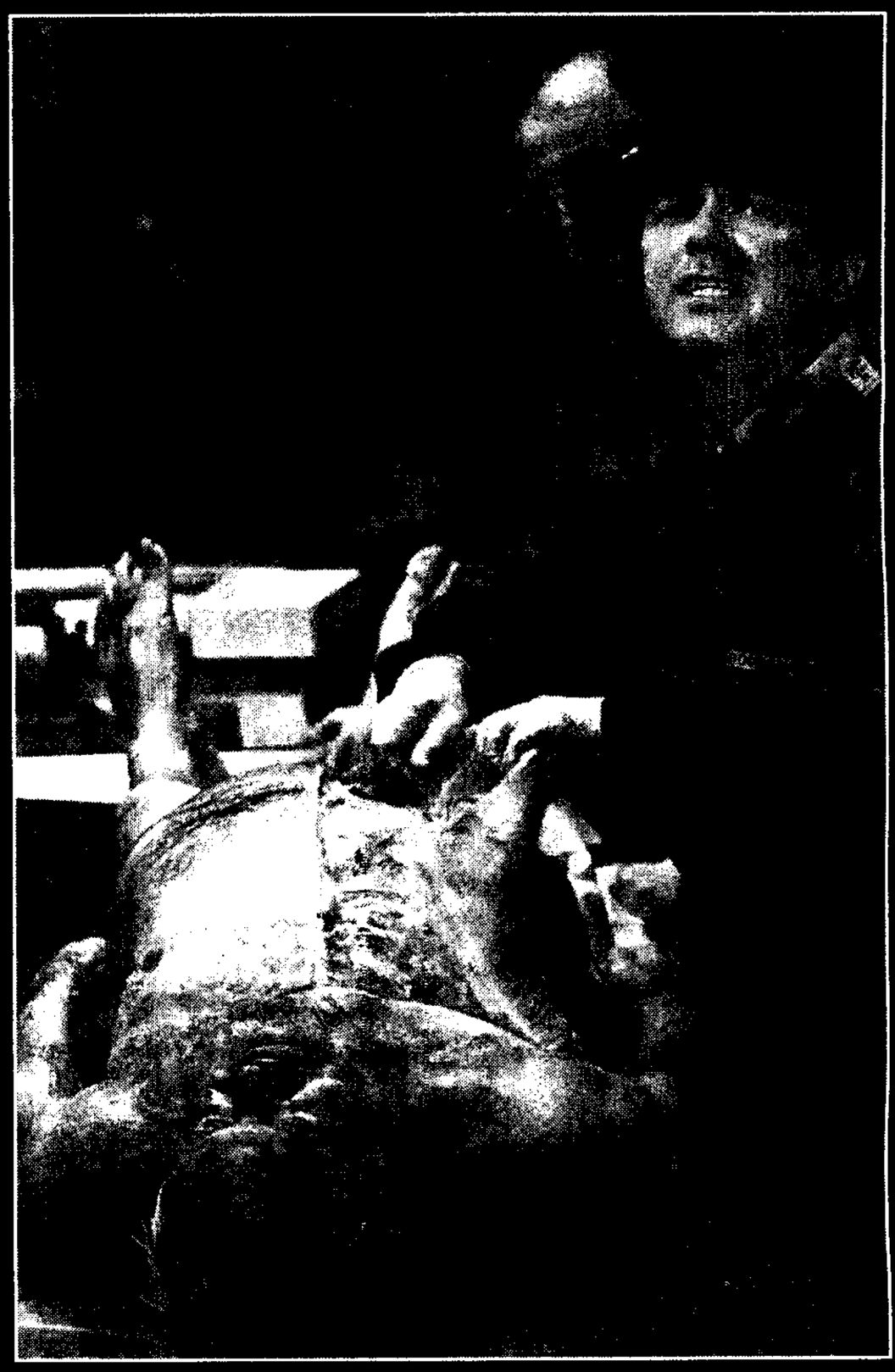
Grauniad Obituaries

St Myra of Hindley

Myra was a witty, warm, lovable, humane, saintly woman whose embracing of the Christian faith and life of prayer were convincing proof of her genuine repentance. We at the Guardian have long championed the merits of such religious faith, well, since at least last week when it fitted in with our desire to annoy the tabloids by being ultra-liberal about someone whose beliefs we would have sneered at if she had not been a mass murderer *(cont. p. 94)*

WHY SHE WAS CREMATED

OUTRAGE OVER PUBLIC AUTOPSY



by Our Medical Staff
Gunter Von Häagen-Dazs

THERE WAS mounting criticism last night over the televised spectacle of a corpse being dissected in public.

The dead body belonged to the 200-year-old Conservative Party and the controversial anatomist Ian Duncan Von Cough cut it open in front of a large crowd in order, he said, "to ascertain the cause of death".

Body Politic

As Von Cough removed all the organs and stripped away the flesh of the party, he assured onlookers, "There is nothing to worry about. There is no soul here. Just a lot of dead meat."

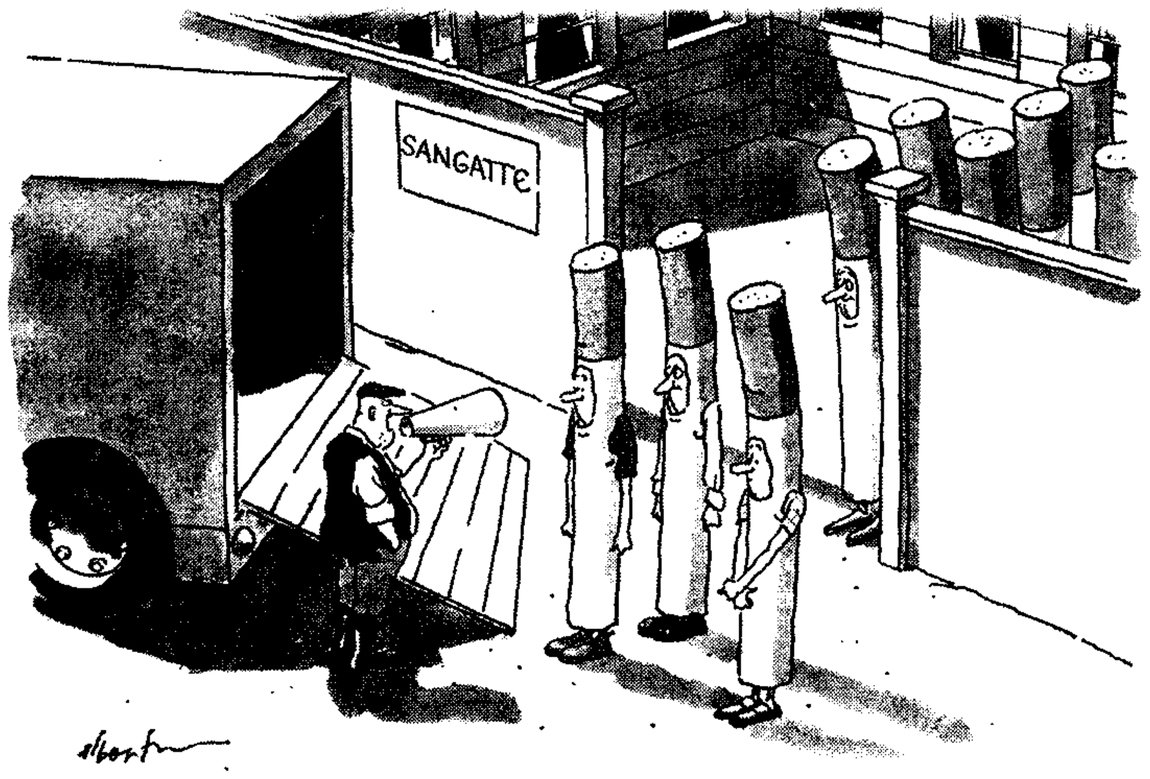
But critics accused him of "putting on a freak show for ghouls".

Said one spin doctor, "This is nothing to do with science. It is just cheap entertainment to amuse the public. The Conservative Party did not deserve to be hacked about by this charlatan. It should be buried and left to rest in peace."

However, Von Cough refused to apologise.

"I now understand the innermost workings of this dead body. And what is more, for my next trick I shall bring it back to life. Just you wait and see. Ha ha ha ha..."

Professor Von Frankensmith is 52.



"Right! Form up in packs of twenty!"

That Honorary Degree Citation in Full

SALUTAMUS BRIANUS MAIAM, GUITARISTUM PRINCIPALIS IN 'REGINA', GROUPUS POPULARIS CANTORIBUS, FAMOSISSIMUS PER 'RHAPSODIA BOHEMIENSIS' CUM FREDERICUS MERCURIENSIS (EHEU NUNC MORTUUS), SED ATQUE FAMOSUS PER PERFORMANS SUPER PALACIO BUCKINGHAMENSIS CUM INSTRUMENTUM ELECTRONICUM IN CELEBRATIONE JUBILATIONE AUREUM BRENDA REGINA IN ANNO MMII ET EXPERTUS IN ARTE ASTRONOMICA ET AMATOR PUELLAE ANITA DOBSONENSIS QUONDAM STELLA IN SAPONA OPERA EASTENDIBUS NOMINE ANGIA ET... ER... ID EST.

© The University of Hertfordshire (formerly Baldock Little Chef)

A Taxi Driver Writes

Every week a well-known cab driver is invited to comment on an issue of topical importance.

THIS WEEK: **Johnny Prescott** (cab no. 4325)

See about them firefighters, guv? Bloody cheek, asking for 40 percent. We'd all like 40 percent, wouldn't we, guv? And for what? I'll tell yer – sitting around on their backsides playing cards and drinking cups of tea. We'd all like to do that for thirty grand. And let's face it they've all got other jobs – painters, plumbers, mini-cab drivers. What about the nurses, then? When you think how hard *they* work for peanuts. And you don't see them going on strike, do you? Toot and support them?

Bollocks! String 'em up, I say, it's the only language they understand. Oh no, I've just run into the back of a bus. Hello, hello? Emergency services? Can you get someone here quick to cut me free? No, we'd all like a 40 percent pay rise. In fact I had one last year...

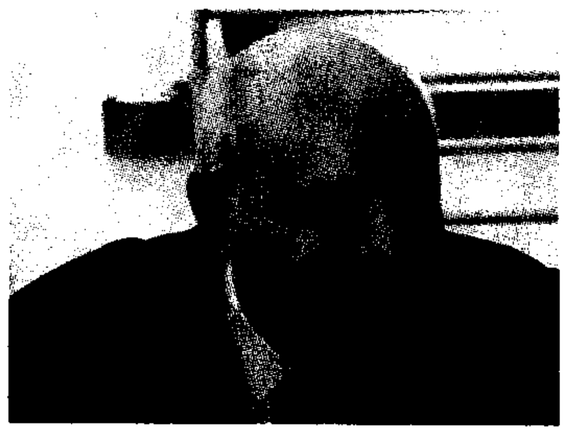
"Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home, your house is on fire, the firemen all gone"

PEKING TIMES

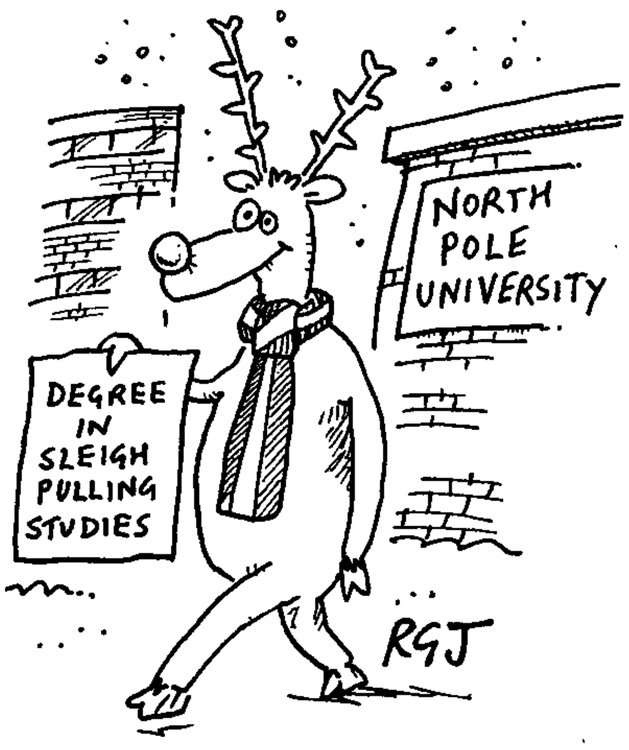
Friday, November 29, 2002

HU TO BECOME PARTY LEADER

by Our London Correspondent ***Mao Mo Lam***

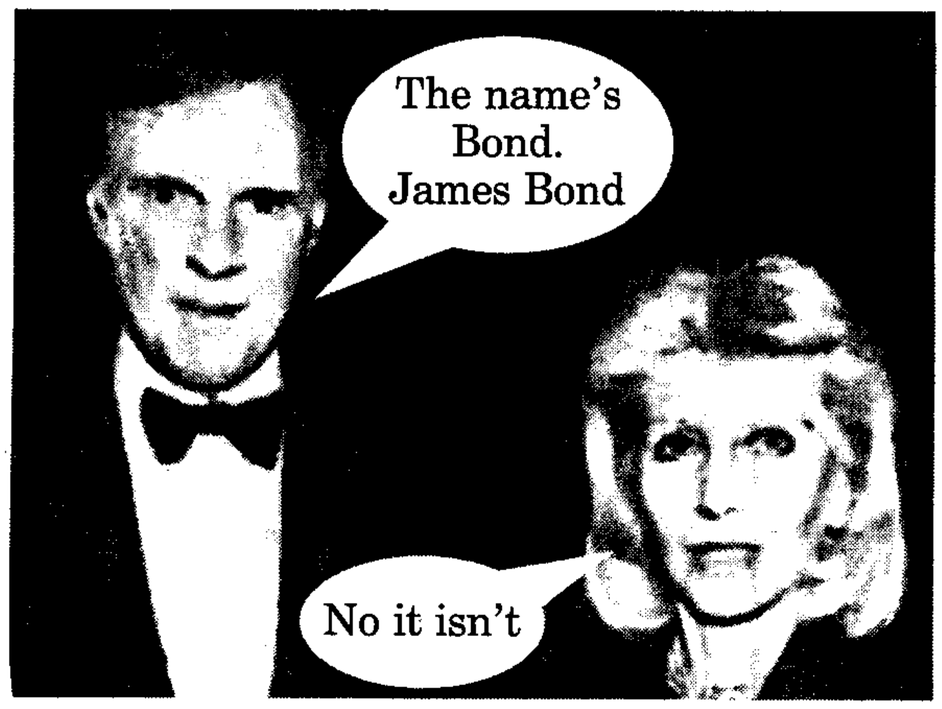


A COMPLETE unknown has taken over as leader of the British Conservative Party. Described as "a bald man in a grey suit", Hu Hee is a surprise choice to emerge from the faceless ranks of the non-ruling elite. "Half-an-hour later they'll choose another one," joked one fellow ***(cont. p. 94)***



Rudolf The Red-Brick Reindeer

LIE ANOTHER DAY



DIARY

CECIL BEATON'S UNEXPURGATED CHRISTMAS

Dec 25th 1970: Chez Moi. Perfectly ghastly church service au matin. Vicar plump, ill-shaven and brutish, ditto choirboys, clad in simply hideous turquoise and shrimp vestments, utterly unwaisted, did less than nothing for their podgy little piggy figures, great fat bottoms swaying this way and that.

We are forced to drone our way through "Away In A Manger". What sort of bedroom is that? Those 1st Century Jews were so stubbornly lazy and drab when it came to making any effort at home decoration. And if there was no room at the Inn, they should jolly well have got their secretary to book them one in advance. Given the choice, I would frankly rather be Away in a Mansion: infinitely more accommodating, and so much more glamorous. Even Away in a Manager might be preferable, though one would have to do something about those awful "lapel badges" they often insist upon wearing on their cheap, ill-cut, two-piece suitings.

Three Kings, albeit from the East, would be a godsend at that time of year, I suppose, but what on earth were they thinking about when they went on to admit all those rank, soggy, common little shepherds, with ghastly soiled sheets for headgear, and nothing but "open-toed" sandals – sandals! – for footwear?

Babies are quite bad enough, but no one should countenance sheep, let alone oxen, in the home. One must, of course, remain ever-grateful that one was not invited oneself for that first Christmas – in Bethlehem, of all places! So suburban! Yet with a few elegant swags and drapes, some simple yet sympathetic lighting and a hairdresser with just a touch of style, one could have improved their image no end. No more the dowdy "Virgin" hiding behind that ugly blue headscarf and shapeless "robe": I would have dressed her in the most marvellous cobalt silk ballgown, displaying the merest hint of cleavage, perhaps with extravagant bell-sleeves, her hair teased and swept back.

Would she have needed a handbag? In her position, she might, I suppose, have been able to get away without one, but I personally would have gone for something petite but gracious, yet – a diamond here, an emerald there – positively dripping with understated wealth.

As for Joseph – nothing to say for himself, terrible dried-up old brute, bearded and grubby, mottled wind-swept cheeks, fingernails bitten to the core, all the while casting those furtive, chip-on-shoulder, dark looks this way and that, unwanted hanger-on par excellence – I would have sent him packing.

The Queen Mother invites one over for a Christmas drink.

"You have never looked so positively radiant, ma'am! I don't know how you do it!" I exclaim as she greets us. In fact, she looks like an overweight hippopotamus – and an ill-bred hippopotamus at that – and I know perfectly well how she does it: by pigging out on chocolate bon-bons and knocking back cheap house champagne from dawn 'til dusk. She may indeed look radiant, but then so too did Hiroshima in its day.

"Cecil, will you sit next to The Queen?" she says. I had high expectations, but once again I was dreadfully let down. Alas, The Queen is no beauty. Far from it. A card-carrying midget, of course – she surrounds herself with corgies to lend her height – and she is not improved by that hair, which is got up to look like Mrs Mopp. It does rather rankle that she makes so little effort when one "drops round". She obviously sees herself as fearfully "important" – all superior smiles and hoity-toity gestures – yet she has zero sex appeal, and would be better suited to serving behind the haberdashery counter at Maison Woolworth. Her embonpoint, too, is crudely obtrusive and tiresomely invasive, so that for one's personal safety one is forced to duck every time she turns round.

"What a marvellous complexion Her Majesty has!" I purr sympathetically to Louis Mount-batten (raddled old mascara'ed buggeriste got up like a pantomime admiral, all over-shone epaulettes and hideous buttons) upon adjourning to the withdrawing room. "And such natural grace and dignity!" Manners are so desperately important in this coarse and vulgar age.

Giving presents for Christmas is, of course, unforgiveably common.

Receiving them, on the other hand, is a sign of good breeding.

I have stored the many presents I have received beneath my Christmas tree – a simple yet stylish Dutch elm – and I "open" them with a pure silver paperknife, immediately disposing of their gaudy wrappings with my private flame-thrower.

Darling Diana Cooper has given me a gold wristwatch. Bless her. Tilted at a certain angle, I can see my face in it. I will not breathe a word against Diana. This is just one of the reasons I keep a diary, in which one can write words rather than breathe them. Diana was always the most sparkling conversationalist and divine beauty. That is why I am so very full of sympathy for her now that she has turned into a wrinkled old sow and a Grade 1 bore, incapable of giving even her closest friends anything more original than gold wristwatches for Christmas. How my heart goes out to her!

An Yves St Laurent floppy bow-tie from my dear old friend Wallis, The Duchess of Windsor. I dote on her. She was never what one might describe as a "beauty", of course, but she had a certain something, namely the then Prince of Wales. She was witty, in a caustic, boot-faced, daggers-drawn sort of way but her looks now make her rather more suited to the Ghost Train at Chessington Zoo, I fear, than to a Royal Palace.

Tring! At the unearthly hour of 8.30 pm, the doorbell goes. "Good King Wenceslas looked out, on the feast of Stephen!" sing a motley group of embittered carol singers, their cheeks pinched and scarlet in the freezing cold.

"I care not a fig whether Mr Wenceslas looked out or not!" I exclaim, slamming the door firmly on their grotesque faces. "He may have styled himself Royal, but he came from what is now Czechoslovakia, and is of no consequence whatsoever! Be off with you!"

Oh, the sheer crude ghastliness of Christmas! As a great friend of Lord Jesus, I know he would be absolutely horrified at what he has now set in motion.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

LOOK AT TROY! STONED OUT OF HIS TINY MIND AGAIN...
IT'S BECOMING A BIT OF A HABIT I'M AFRAID, SIR...
HE WORRIES ME, JOHNSON. ALL HE SEEMS TO WANT TO DO IS SIT AROUND GETTING SMASHED. IT'S RIDICULOUS BEHAVIOUR.
YES, SIR... I WONDER WHERE HE GETS IT FROM..
VERY WITTY, JOHNSON.
MY BUREAU, ACTUALLY. THE LITTLE SH*T...

Literary Review

Pop psychology

Journals
Kurt Cobain
(Viking, £20)

CURIOUSLY enough the best place to find a cultural relativist in these stirring times is not one of our "new" universities (*"Buffy The Vampire Slayer: Zeitgeist Signifier"*, etc) but the upper reaches of rock journalism.

Seeking to explain the phenomenon under discussion here I turned eagerly to Jon Savage's dauntless compendium *Time Travel: From the Sex Pistols to Nirvana* (Vintage 1996) to discover that Kurt Cobain "brilliantly embodied the anger and desperation of white Western youth, struggling to make the transition between adolescence and adulthood in societies without adequate rituals". What was once only rock and roll is now, alas, merely a sociological construct.

And never was there a pop sociological construct like our Kurt! No way, baby! As in certain branches of literature, by far the simplest way to acquire that admission ticket to the rock pantheon is to do away with yourself. Dead these eight-and-a-half years, lead dude of a rock band that scarcely survived its second album proper, our man has since acquired an altogether towering iconic status: a "genius", naturally (the Penguin publicity blurb), creative powerhouse of "the most important band in the world" (*Q*). Confronted with the latest searing artefact from the vault – a fat, shiny offering got up in the style of a Thames & Hudson art book – one could easily be seduced into thinking that one was in the presence of, well, something halfway serious.

Journals. I love the title, don't you, with its stern implication of major-league gravitas? Not "some old bits of paper we managed to retrieve from the bin-liners" but *Journals*. Kurt's journals (photocopied, natch, rather than printed up) extend to nearly 300 pages. They include, in no particular order or echelon of interest, rough drafts of Kurt's abstruse song lyrics, lists – Kurt was a great list man – of favourite bands and records, scrawled t-shirt designs, countless versions of early press releases, the recipe for Kurt's mother's "seashell shrimp salad" (a tad heavy on the mayonnaise, I'd say) and a tactful if somewhat circuitous letter from the early days firing one of the ensemble's drummers.

I'm not like them
But I can pretend
I make up words that aren't ever heard

The sun is gone
But I have a light
The day is done
But I'm having fun.

That's right – *brilliantly* embodies the anger and whatever. That Penguin should have forked out countless thousands for this stuff and the *Observer* been conned into buying the serial rights is of course a splendid joke, even more so in that the seriousness that attends the enterprise – the tortured genius, spokesman for a generation's hurt, etc – is persistently undermined by the author himself. Cobain, who emerges from these fragments as a shy, scrupulous and rather charming character, made no great claims for the significance of what he did, kept a sardonic eye on the trappings of his success, believed that what he produced was "art" while trying to keep his be-trainered feet firmly on the floor.

Never mind, the yoof-conscious execs at the *Observer* will have their little jape! What *Journals* demonstrates, once again – it was last demonstrated by the publication of Paul McCartney's "poems" a year or two back – is that any attempt to separate out and elevate the various elements of the pop noise is doomed to failure. Just as the words of most of the Lennon and McCartney canon, seen simply as words, would do credit to a bright sixth-former writing in a school magazine, so the stray jottings that Kurt confided to a succession of ring-bound writing pads are just that – the ruminations of a somewhat disturbed and musically inclined Reagan-era American punk kid, brought to our attention solely because they happen to have been written by Kurt Cobain. This is not to say that they lack all interest. In fact the whole is ominously revealing of the modern media process: a human being trying vainly to crawl out from beneath the pile of garbage dumped on his head by messieurs and mesdames the critics.

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt94

Moy Sand and Gravel
Paul Muldoon *(Faber, £14.99)*

Being a distinguished contemporary Irish poet – like Seamus and
Tom and them other fellers –
carries its own responsibilities. Bringing in the cultural allusions
(Tom likes Verlaine, I'm more of a Valery guy) while remembering in the end
that your verse man, like the one who recited to Brian Boru,
is only a story teller. It
doesn't have to scan, of course, but you
can arrange it over the page to look
as if it
does. And meanwhile the funny place-names need a mention,
so I'm putting in Auchnacloy, Cullaville and Derrymacash, some of them
in *italics*, in the hope that
they'll grab your attention. Did I forget anything? Oh
yes Dev and O'Hanlon and all that ould Gaelic stuff. That fifties childhood, of course,
with the packet of fags on the car seat and the clothes built to
last. Anything else would be
forswearing our past. Me, Seamus, Tom and the others. As poetry
goes – and boy does it go – we're just calling your
bluff.

Dangerous Games

Pevsner on Art and Architecture: The Radio Talks
Ed. Stephen Games
(Methuen, £20)

NOTHING so sexy as Nazism when it comes to selling books. "A Nazi in England", screamed the headline in the London *Evening Standard* arts pages above an extract from Stephen Games's introduction to *Pevsner on Art and Architecture: The Radio Talks*, published by Methuen.

Poor old Nikolaus Pevsner. Suffering from the insuperable impediment of being foreign on top of being clever and incredibly hard-working, the late founder and author of the *Buildings of England* volumes has always attracted criticism. It began with John Betjeman and has continued ever since. Last year John Murray published Tim Mowl's ignorant rehash of the Pevsner-Betjeman quarrel, *Stylistic Cold Wars*. But Pevsner as a Nazi reaches new depths.

Yes, Pevsner was a German patriot; yes, he tried to conceal his Jewishness; yes, he believed passionately in modern architecture as well as in planning, in public works to relieve unemployment and in national regeneration – so did many others in the 1930s. There is no evidence that this naïve intellectual, prohibited from teaching because of his Jewishness, supported the National Socialist party, let alone joined it.

Games – an architectural journalist and himself the son of a Jewish émigré – wilfully discards any historical empathy with the predicament of someone like Pevsner in 1933 and, ably abetted by the subs of the *Standard*, manipulates the facts shamelessly.

The Pevsner family must now regret having given Games permission to publish the talks. Soon after Sir Nikolaus's death in 1983, the family commissioned Games to write his life. They soon realised their mistake, cancelled the agreement and asked the serious biographer Susie Harries to take on the task instead. Now Games is having his revenge. The presentation of his article in the *Standard* also cast aspersions on the German historian's great gift to Britain, the *Pevsner Architectural Guides*. But when the chairman of the Buildings Book Trust which supports the continuing project, that pillar of the establishment Simon Jenkins, was asked to write to the *Evening Standard* to protest, he demurred, arguing that the fuss would soon blow over.

Bookshop, Kingston upon Thames

IT'S AN AMAZING STORY OF COURAGE, NERVE AND DARING
THE CAGE, AN ENGLISHMAN IN VIETNAM
THE CAGE
THE CAGE
- PUBLISHING THIS STUFF WHEN EVERYONE SAYS IT'S COBBLERS!
THE CAGE
THE CAGE

"They all want to play the star"

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ IT MIGHT just be coincidence, but shortly after we mentioned false accusations of theft, erroneous dismissals and general skulduggery at the Waterstone's in Deansgate, Manchester (*Eye* 1066), the shop was visited by managing director Steve Knott.

Staff were unsure if Knott's visit was a gesture of reassurance or the start of a witch-hunt to find out who'd blown the whistle; but new manager Steve Callaghan and retail manager Tony Grice welcomed him with open arms.

Callaghan joined Waterstone's as a manager, having learned his transferable skills at the bargain clothing chain TK Maxx. Meanwhile Grice — known to minions as the "Anti-Grice" — distinguished himself at the time of the Deansgate One's dismissal by breaching confidentiality protocols and announcing to everyone in the pub who would listen that the departing bookseller had been on the take for years – something which has been disproved conclusively by CCTV evidence.

The employment tribunal is set for 16 December when, presumably, Waterstone's will release the security tape and clear its former employee's name.

■ **ONLINE booksellers are known for offering huge discounts, but a new player called Mypoints.com seems to be carrying it further than most.**

A reader was amused to receive a piece of junk email offering 350 points for joining the Mystery and Thriller Club — and a copy of Jeffrey Archer's *Prison Diary* for the bargain price of 5p. Unfortunately, even at a discount of 99.6 percent, our correspondent passed on the offer, but instead wondered if "someone has finally realised what Jeffrey Archer is really worth"?

■ IF YOU ever get offered a penny for your thoughts, chances are you're not a celebrity.

Take Dale Winton and Ulrika Jonsson. Century gave Winton an advance north of £400,000 for his memoir, *Dale: My Story*, while Jonsson is reputed to have bagged a *Mail*-assisted £1m from Sidgwick and Jackson for *Honest*. The publishers justified their outlay by promising revelations galore.

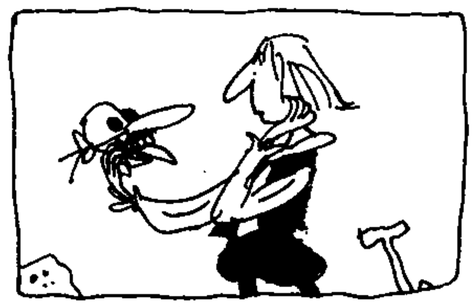
In Ulrika's case they got mileage out of Sven but missed the rape allegations. Winton less spectacularly supplied the answer to the burning question of his sexuality. (Yes he is). Neither of these "books" is anything other than a celebrity cash-in; and almost the only point of interest in Winton's is his account of how he has sacked numerous agents in his attempt to get to the top.

His current agent Jan Kennedy, however, seems safe for a while. In addition to negotiating this lucrative deal, she was the one who screwed £550,000 out of Sidgwick last year for Bruce Forsyth's disastrous memoir. Meanwhile, in *Honest* Jonsson tells us that she does a lot of corporate gigs for Coca-Cola, and this allows her to mention the drink so many times that one wonders if publishing has finally got the hang of product placement.

Ulrika also thanks "lovely Saab" in the acknowledgments for "keeping me safely and fantastically mobile". And if that were not enough, she even compares one of her former lovers to her sturdy Swedish motor. These "books" obviously make economic sense for the celebrities. But is there any evidence that they make money for publishers?

'Bookworm'

LUVVIES



I've always wanted the world to be a movie; I want theme music when I walk down the street. After I started making movies, I started saying "Cut!" when I wanted a conversation to end.

WINONA RYDER
Sunday Times

'The most important thing for me is to take care of my daughter, India, who I adopted when I married Eric. I hug her every day. Eric hugs me every day. I hug my mum... Those hugs are important to me.'

HALLE BERRY
Daily Mail

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Warballs

"Beretta is proud to introduce the Limited Edition United We Stand Model 92F 9mm pistol with laser-etched gold American flag and engraved script. A total of 2001 pieces will be made, each engraved with a serial identification number ('1 of 2001') on its slide. Beretta USA will make a donation from the proceeds to the NYPD Foundation and Survivors' Fund of the National Capital Region. This pistol is testimony that the American spirit will not be diminished during this national crisis. United We Stand."

— Advert for new Beretta handgun.

"The worldwide economic downturn, magnified by the terrorist attacks last year, did not affect diamond sales as much as other luxury goods, he says. In America, he believes, diamonds have for some people become an expression of a more compassionate attitude after the 11 September attacks. 'A real tragedy was visited upon them – they had been immune to that sort of thing before,' he says. 'This has caused a push to traditional values in life, and, obviously, diamonds are very much a part of that ethos.'"

— Interview with De Beers chairman Nicky Oppenheimer, the *Times*.

Pseuds Corner

The Turner [Prize]...has tried to engage with the sort of art which has the courage to ask questions, to test established parameters and breach popular boundaries. It has played a game of shove-ha'penny at the cracking edge of culture.

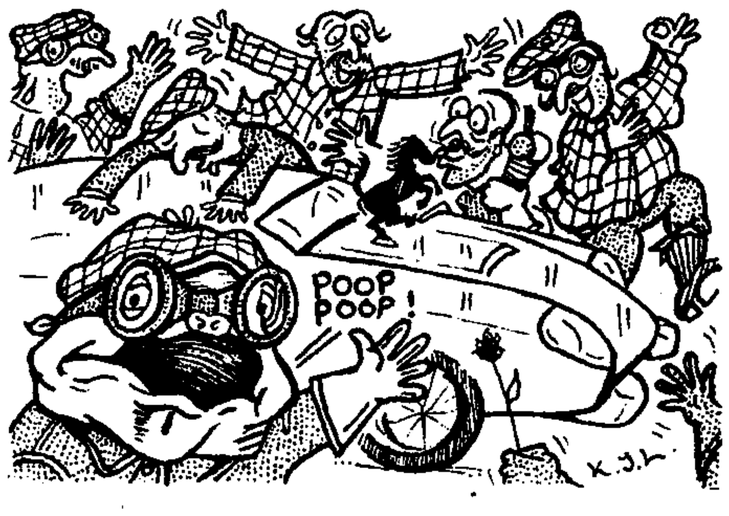
RACHAEL CAMPBELL JOHNSTON
The Times

This is very highly wrought food. It has the edginess and mild fury of Gordon Ramsay's first two years at Royal Hospital Road...

GILES COREN
***The Times* Magazine**

Fissured Skin, Inner Ear Radio, and a Telepathic Nose: The Senses as Media in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

Oxford University English faculty seminar



Historically speaking, Ferraris have shown a passion for gorgeous sculptural form, a sense of primal joy about driving, an exquisite specialness, a veneration of craft, a commitment to auditory indulgence, a sheer erotic sense of *bella figura*, a gloriously eccentric industrial adventure that could only be Italian.

STEPHEN BAYLEY
***Daily Telegraph* motoring section**

No, I didn't steal anything. Well, actually, yes I did. I remember that as a child I was a member of a gang who would go shoplifting. Not big items – just things like sherbert flying saucers. I was about eight. I'm sure that what was going on was that I was trying to work out the nature of property. All children are natural communists.

ALAIN DE BOTTON
***Guardian* symposium on Winona Ryder's conviction for shoplifting**

Pseuds Corporate

IBM must become a showcase on demand company. We have to make information flow fluidly, horizontally, regardless of the way org charts are drawn. We need to integrate all of our products and services through open standards, taking advantage of a 'virtualized' operating environment able to manage its own complexity.

From the IBM intranet

CONTRIBUTORS: Phil Marsden, A. Crocker, Lord Gnome, Malcolm Bielby, Marc Stoneham, Anon.

£10 paid for all entries *(except those by Professor Gideon Carter of the* Sunday Times Style Section *who is a fictional, spoof character. Apologies, joke missed. Ed.)*

IN THE BACK

TONY'S NEW CRONIES

THE November issue of *This Caring Business*, the voice of the independent healthcare sector, has on its front page a charming picture of the prime minister opening a new care home in his constituency.

The article drooled: "The prime minister was greatly impressed by the two-storey home's spacious facilities which he marked by unveiling a plaque and planting a willow tree in the garden. He described the new home, called Willowdene, as a 'magnificent facility' and told the directors and managers: 'You can be very proud of yourselves. This is definitely in the 5-star variety'."

The picture shows Tony Blair chatting over a cup of tea with Mr George Houghton and his wife Jennifer, and two directors of the nursing home,

Geoff Wade(first left), Joan Finlay (third left) Mr and Mrs Houghton (fourth and fifth left) and friend

Geoff Wade and Joan Finlay. The owners of the new home were named as a company in Washington, Tyne and Wear, called Executive Care Management.

What the tea drinkers were talking about was not reported. But it was almost certainly not the ticklish subject of the Gallant group of companies, almost all of which are in liquidation.

The Gallant group owned five nursing homes: Oaklands in Burnley; St Andrews in Stanley, Co Durham; Westvilla in Retford, Notts; Winscome Care Home at Fareham, Hants; and Oakridge in Sheffield. All five went into receivership last October. The receiver, Numerica of Manchester, met George Houghton, the chairman of the Gallant holding company, who explained that his companies had been driven out of business by a greedy and reckless debenture holder. But this was not the picture that emerged when the receiver started to look at the nursing homes and the companies.

There was a pattern of debt and moving money round the companies in the group. One nursing home, Oakbridge, owed £164,000 to the debenture holder but £370,000 to other companies in the group, £71,000 to mainly local traders and £154,000 in tax and national insurance. Among the prominent directors in the group were Geoff Wade and Joan Finlay. Much of the finance came from a Washington firm called ECM, run by Mrs Jennifer Houghton. Could ECM by any chance be related to Executive Care Management? We just don't know.

The Gallant companies have now been put in liquidation under another insolvency practitioner, RMT of Newcastle-on-Tyne. A few conversations with the people running the five homes when they were suddenly left in the lurch by their owners were enough to convince the *Eye* that their view of the merits of the Houghtons and their colleagues is rather less flattering than that of the prime minister.

THE HINDUJAS

PETER'S FRIENDS GO ON TRIAL

PETER Mandelson has been quick to comment on the news and highlight the awful dangers of conceding to the fire-fighters. But he seems to have missed an interesting news item from New Delhi.

INDIAN JUDGE ORDERS HINDUJAS TRIAL NEXT MONTH ran the headline in the Financial Times above a story that Judge Kumar had set down the trial of the three Hinduja brothers for 4 December. Said the judge: "This is a case of deep-rooted conspiracy and political pay-offs and bristles with all manner of complications and complexities." He added that there was "strong prima facie evidence to prosecute the brothers for cheating conspiracy and abetting corruption".

The suggestion that the billionaire Hindujas, who run a world-wide oil and trading empire from London, may have been involved in pay-offs connected with the purchase by the Indian government of arms from the Swedish company Bofors was set out in the Eye four years ago (963). Our piece coincided with the million-pound donation by the Hindujas to the "spiritual space" in the millennium dome, masterminded by Peter Mandelson. Mandelson was regularly feted at the Hindujas' lavish parties in the style to which prime ministers such as Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair had grown accustomed.

Two years later Eye 1014 and most of the British press got in trouble with the Hindujas' prestigious lawyers, Devonshires, for daring to report that the brothers had been charged in India with the Bofors corruption. Not so, said Mr Justin Fletcher of Devonshires. They had not been charged at all. All that had happened was that a charge sheet had been drawn up against then. He demanded apologies all round.

Most British newspapers, notably the Daily Express, which the Hindujas were trying to buy, grovelled. The Eye preferred to quote from the charge sheet itself – which alleged that the brothers had been involved in a criminal conspiracy and had received commissions from Bofors. The news from New Delhi now clears the matter up. The Hindujas are charged. They will stand trial for corruption.

Whether they will actually appear in the dock is still in some doubt and may involve lengthy extradition proceedings. For the brothers are British citizens, thanks at least in part to the prompt action of the British home office whose attention to the case for British nationality for the Hinduja brothers was so blatantly supported by Peter Mandelson that he had to resign as secretary of state for Northern Ireland.

PRISONS

PACK 'EM, RACK 'EM AND STACK 'EM

IF IT isn't completely eviscerated in its passage through the Lords, experts predict that Tony Blair's latest criminal justice bill – with its provision of fewer jury trials, doubling of magistrates' sentencing powers and allowing previous convictions to be revealed – could add another 10,000 to the record 73,000 prison population.

With overcrowded jails already bursting into unrest and inmates having to be held in police cells, there is nowhere to put any more prisoners. The government's response – building more jails which do little or nothing to rehabilitate – comes at an extraordinary cost. The bill for being Europe's biggest jailer has already doubled in the last four years to £3bn a year. Napo, the probation officers' union, says the extra 10 jails needed with the current legislation will cost another £200m a year.

Meanwhile sweeping away the discriminatory laws which have criminalised consenting gay sex will reduce the prison population by about, er, 100. Although the numbers of men charged with gross indecency, buggery or importuning have fallen in recent years, latest figures show that about 2,000 "offences" are still recorded by police each year. In 2000 128 men and four youths were imprisoned.

QUESTION: How many privatised contractors do you need to replace lightbulbs in a Kent bail hostel? Answer: Two – if the first one drives all the way from London with neither a ladder nor lightbulbs.

This pitiful tale of incompetence is one of many in a dossier compiled by probation staff who must deal with the consequences of the home office decision to sell off the cooks, cleaners, gardeners and maintenance staff who work in the country's probation hostels to Morrisons, now part of the Anglian Water group.

Others incidents include a hostel in Hampshire being sent a series of unsuitable cooks, including one whose partner had just come out of jail and another who was selling dodgy goods to residents; and another where a request for halal meat for one resident resulted in unwanted special dietary provision for all 24 residents.

While privatisation costs each of the country's 101 hostels an extra £20,000 a year from their over-stretched budgets, it now seems they can apply to a hardship fund for any shortfall. So taxpayers again get to pay towards private profits.

FOLLY STYRENE

RESIDENTS of Loddon in Norfolk have long been worried about dangerous emissions of carcinogenic styrene fumes from a local factory owned by Ex-Press Plastics.

Despairing of their local council, which failed to impose controls on the factory that the 1990 environmental protection act demands, they appealed last May to their MP, John MacGregor. There was little joy there. As *Eye* 1027 noted, MacGregor was a director of DAF Trucks, Ex-Press Plastic's biggest client.

Campaigners were therefore delighted when Richard Bacon, who took over from the retiring MacGregor as Conservative candidate for South Norfolk, wrote a sympathetic article in a local free paper during last year's general election campaign. "I am concerned about the fumes being emitted from the Ex-Press Plastics factory at Loddon, which are causing such trouble for local residents... 'Styrene Sickness' is not uncommon in industry after exposure to styrene vapours or mists and characteristic signs and symptoms include headache, fatigue, weakness, depression and unsteadiness or feelings of drunkenness. Even worse, there are summaries of many scientific studies, including those sponsored by the World Health Organisation and other reputable bodies, which indicate possible links between styrene and cancer."

How an increased majority changes things! South Norfolk council has now declared its intention to force Ex-Press to reduce the emissions. Ex-Press managing director Simon King plans to appeal – and Richard Bacon MP has pledged to make a personal appeal to the secretary of state for the environment – on the company's behalf!

WHAT THE BUTLER DIDN'T SEE

COMMANDER John Yates, the Scotland Yard officer in charge of the investigation into royal butler Paul Burrell, was under investigation for perverting the course of justice at the time of the butler's trial. Mr Burrell's lawyers did not know of this until the trial was almost over.

They heard the news not from the prosecution but from a solicitor, Mark Lake, who made a formal complaint in a signed witness statement against Mr Yates last year on behalf of his client, a detective constable. After reading the reports of the Burrell case, Mr Lake decided to pass his large dossier to the Burrell defence team.

The dossier was based on a complaint by former detective constable Jeff May that he was wrongly suspended from the police after allegations by a woman drug dealer. Mr May has since left the police force but is suing for false arrest. His complaint has been passed to home secretary David Blunkett by his MP, the Lib Dem Paul Burstow.

Defence lawyers in the Burrell case were preparing to raise the facts in the May dossier when Commander Yates gave evidence; but the case was suddenly ended by the judge before the defence case was even heard.

While public attention has been on the butler's story in the *Mirror* and the resulting inquiry ordered by Prince Charles at St James's Palace, the focus has shifted away from the role of the police in the Burrell affair – especially the misleading story told to Princes Charles and William by the police. Somehow the police investigation into Commander Yates has escaped public attention too.

According to a letter from DCS Robert Milton, a senior officer in the inquiry into Yates, the inquiry team expects to make recommendations any day now. Yet, 16 months after the allegations were first made, Commander Yates has still not been officially notified of the investigation into him. Police regulations say a complaint against an officer should be notified to that officer "as soon as is practicable". Could the delay have anything to do with official reluctance to reveal to Burrell's defence the news of the investigation while Commander Yates was in charge such of a glamorous case?

NOT CRICKET

THERE are many people connected with the criminal justice system who are not mourning the recent death of Sir Patrick Russell. Among them are the families of friends of the Birmingham Six, whom Pat Russell prosecuted when he was a barrister; and the Bridgewater Three, whom Lord Justice Russell, as senior judge at the court of appeal, sent back to prison for eight years despite overwhelming evidence of their innocence.

In normal circumstances, however, Sir Patrick could have hoped for some show of respect from supporters of Lancashire Country Cricket Club where he was president from 1999 to 2001. Yet several club members were astonished to read in the *Daily Telegraph* obituary (2 November) that Sir Patrick "conducted a secret inquiry into the remarkable coincidence of wives of senior Lancashire officials having won trips to Thailand for four consecutive years in the raffle held to raise money for cricketers in their benefit years".

The *Telegraph* reported: "After extensive interviews with all concerned, Russell declared himself 'a hundred percent sure' that nothing untoward had taken place." This appears to be the first ever public reference to the secret inquiry and its bizarre outcome, and prompts the suggestion that Sir Patrick must have, in the course of his inquiry, drawn deep on the forensic acumen he displayed at the Bar and on the bench.

SILLY OLD BARTS (cont.)

HOSPITAL managers in London know how to deal with staff who criticise private finance initiative (PFI) deals: sack them and make them homeless.

Managers at the Barts and the London NHS Trust dismissed Phil Billows, branch secretary of health union Unison, after he represented his members by opposing the massive PFI scheme at the hospital (see In the Back, last *Eye*). Because he lives in hospital accommodation, he is now homeless as well as jobless. Oddly, the charity that manages health workers' accommodation is supposedly separate from the hospital management, but his eviction letter arrived on the same day as his dismissal.

The hospital told the *Eye* Mr Billows' dismissal "was not related to trade union duties" and had nothing to do with "his views on the PFI scheme". But the letter announcing his sacking relates *entirely* to union activity. And at his disciplinary hearing managers presented a 100-page dossier comprising Unison leaflets and press cuttings about... the union's opposition to the PFI scheme!

The dossier cited a letter from Jim Fitzpatrick MP, forwarding a constituent's concern about Billows' suspension, as an example of Billows' allegedly "disreputable" behaviour. Some of the "evidence" was even more bizarre: a cutting from a Wakefield newspaper relating to an East End murder, but unrelated to Billows, Unison or the PFI.

According to the hospital, Billows was sacked for "serious insubordination" and "unauthorised absence from duty" – all of which stems from controversy surrounding two letters. Mr Billows did not want to accept one hand-delivered letter about union activity from hospital managers without a full-time union official being present. And hospital managers claim not to have received a letter from Billows asking for time off for union work for three afternoons in July. He had taken the same time off for union duties each week for the previous 18 months without complaint.

Hospital managers wrote that Billows deserved the sack because he breached "the non-adversarial/problem-solving style that the Trust expected". But the hospital did accept that Billows, who had worked at Barts for 12 years, has "an unblemished formal disciplinary record".

PS: WHILE the Barts trust is busy getting rid of a health worker with an unblemished disciplinary record, a firm bidding for the PFI scheme at the hospital, Skanska from Sweden, has been poisoning people.

Skanska, part of the consortium dominated by former Barts managers, won a contract in 1997 to build a railway tunnel in Sweden. Huge amounts of a grout called "Rhoca-Gil" were injected into the rocks to prevent leaks. Unfortunately, the grout contains highly toxic acrylamide, which has mutagenic properties and can cause cancer if absorbed by the skin or ingested orally. Workers were not given protective clothing and 20 of them developed nervous difficulties. In January Skanska was fined a record £222,000 for the poisoning and two of its managers were fined for "punishable negligence".

THE HOUSE THAT JACK ADVISED

JACK CUNNINGHAM, Tony Blair's former cabinet "enforcer", has become entangled with a company at the centre of massive international fraud allegations and claims of sanctions-busting against Iraq.

Cunningham has earned around £50,000 advising Allied Deals, now RBG Resources, a metal-trading company whose US arm is believed to have supplied materials to Saddam Hussein.

This is all very embarrassing for Tony Blair since his long-awaited dossier on Saddam's weapons programme relied heavily on claims that Iraq was seeking particular metals for a nuclear programme.

After leaving the cabinet Cunningham became a £25,000-a-year adviser to Allied, now RBG, run by Indian-born multi-millionaire Viren Rastogi. Rastogi was arrested last May after RBG and other companies in the group – key among which is RBG Global, based in the tax haven Virgin Islands — went bust amid allegations of a £400m international banking fraud. He denies the claims.

Now confidential US treasury documents have surfaced in New York appearing to show that the US arm, Allied Deals Inc, run by Rastogi's brother Narendra (in jail awaiting trial for alleged fraud), is also believed to have sold US$1m of metal to an alleged Iraqi front company operating out of Jordan. If true, this could lead to fines or imprisonment. While the type of metal sold by Allied to the firm is not known, Tony Blair's dossier says Iraq has made repeated covert attempts to secure large quantities of aluminium tubes for nuclear weapons.

As well as advising Allied/RBG, Cunningham, who chairs the committee looking at Lords reform, also became a director of another Rastogi company, The Company Hub, an internet subsidiary. While he declared this as a remunerated directorship in November 2000, he made no mention of it in the latest register of MPs' interests, even though the company's annual return for March 2002 lists

him as a director. Cunningham says this is because he resigned in April 2001.

Cunningham refused to say what advice he had given Allied RBG, what checks he had made about the company or if, or when, he ever learned about the allegations of sanctions-busting. In a statement to the Eye he said: "I became an adviser to Allied Deals in early 2000 after making appropriate inquiries about the company and its business. The appointment was cleared in the normal way by the Cabinet Office Committee which deals with such matters. I had no meetings with or contacts of any kind with anyone involved in Allied Deals or any of its subsidiaries during my time as a minister.

"Whilst an adviser to the company, I never had any contact with anyone in the Rastogi family other than Viren Rastogi. I ceased to be a director of CoHub in April 2001 when the company which was attempting to develop in e-commerce closed for business.

"I was not at any time involved in any international trade of financial transactions of Allied Deals (RBG or any associated company) nor did I have any knowledge of them. I resigned as an adviser to Allied Deals with effect from April 2002. In my limited role as an external adviser I was never in possession of any information which could reasonably have led me to suspect any wrongdoing.

"I have not been approached by anyone involved in investigations of RBG (Allied Deals) nor do I expect to be. I have no further comments to make."

So that's all right, then.

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

BANANAS SPLITS

THE business pages in recent months have been rightly full of justifiable outrage over the latest City scandal – split capital trusts – which have separated thousands of investors from billions of savings while enriching those who booked them on to this particular ship of fools.

Fund managers such as the arrogant and unrepentant suits at Aberdeen Asset Management, commission-fed stockbrokers such as Brewin Dolphin and Collins Stewart, who deny any wrongdoing, have all correctly been in the firing line along with greedy independent financial advisers (IFAs) who stuffed their clients with "splits" and dined out on the proceeds.

But one group has avoided its share of justified criticism for this debacle. A group without whose assistance it would not have been possible for the £12bn invested in "splits", most of it in the period 1998 to 2000, to have been attracted from the 50,000 victims. That missing guilty group? Why, the very same financial sections which are now castigating the City suits and regulators.

Split capital trusts, which have been around from the 1960s, picked up a new life in the 80s and took off in the 90s as both interest rates and inflation fell and share prices boomed. At the end of 1998 the amount invested in "splits" was £6bn. Within a year that figure had zoomed 50 percent to £9m. Lower but still impressive growth continued through 2000 as the stock market see-sawed to its double peak before beginning its 40 percent slump.

Throughout this period the business pages were regularly splattered with impressive advertisements at premium prices and editorial "puffs" for promoters of "splits" led by managers such as Aberdeen, BFS, Exeter, Legg Mason and Framlington.

The impression was infamously given that "splits" had "as many safety features as a Volvo" — although who exactly coined that libel on a fine Swedish manufacturer of solid motors is unclear. One IFA who certainly gave it currency was Kean Seager, who told the *Mail on Sunday* as long ago as February 1995 that he considered zero coupon preference shares (one of the classes of investment offered by "splits" along with the much more risky income and capital shares) "the Volvo cars of the investment world… They are built to get you there without risking life and limb."

"Zeros" – which repaid a calculable but not guaranteed return (nothing with "splits" was guaranteed, as those in the 19 that have collapsed now realise to their cost) – were the supposedly safest "splits" bet. They ranked ahead of the income and capital shares when the trust was wound up after five or more years. The repayment was capital not income and so could be sheltered from tax by using the annual capital gains allowance. These were promoted heavily as ideal for paying school fees or for weddings. The income shares paid out yearly and were to

(hopefully) return their capital. The capital shares ranked last; but, if the managers and market did their stuff, would pay out most. "Splits" were fearsomely complex so advice was always necessary and always available from the financial pages and their IFA favourites.

That then was the message remorselessly pumped out weekend after weekend by the personal finance gurus on every broadsheet and those middle England tabloids like the *Mail*, read most by those with substantial savings.

The seemingly unstoppable appeal of "splits" was fuelled in particular by the remarkable success of just one pioneer split capital investment trust – Scottish National run by Gartmore. Converted from a traditional investment trust to a "split" in 1987, by 1998, when it was due to wind up, the *Independent* – "A split trust is a big winner" – and *Mail on Sunday* – "Rich rewards when risk takers get it right" – were drooling over the returns made: £3,000 to £34,000 since 1995.

True, many of the columns extolling the virtues of "splits" and particularly the "zeros" they issued carried a wealth warning about risk. "It's not out of the question that you could lose everything if there was a market upset," the *Independent* reported IFA Tim Cockerill as saying in May 1998. Diana Wright in the *Times* in January 1997 was particularly prescient. "When they are good, they may be very, very good, but when they are bad, they are horrid." But this was clearly lost in the gloss as the "splits" bandwagon was revved up even by those such as Wright.

As were the warnings reported in some papers from 1999 onwards about the "magic circle" of fund managers investing in each others' "splits", the ultimate cause – along with bank borrowings to obtain gearing and the market slump – of the collapse of so many funds, particularly those linked with Aberdeen.

But throughout the years of the "splits" boom the financial pages could see only good news for investors, which was why the promoters were able to sell £6bn worth of split capital trusts in little more than two years.

"Splitting the load provides the road to redemption" was the February 1996 headline in the *Observer*. "Take the zero dividend option" invited the *Times* in October that year. "Profit from Victorian Values" was the headline in the *Guardian* that same month.

"The rewards from pooling different investors' risks" headlined another *Independent* article in February 1997, talking of the "safe promise" and "good but cautious return" offered by "zeros". The *Sunday Times* that month saw "zeros" as a "low risk ride" adding: "Stockbrokers continue to recommend zeros for safe fixed returns." You bet they did.

The *Daily Mail*, which moves much of middle England's money, in June 1997 saw "splits" as a "capital idea for making money grow". In September the *Sunday Times* published the recommendation from Chase de Vere Investments for "five recommended split capital trusts that carry little risk to investors". "Save for school fees with a flexible friend", wrote Diana Wright, now at the *ST*, with none of the stark warning of nine months before.

By 1998 press coverage of "splits" was becoming more excited. "Split capital trusts aim to please all investors all of the time", announced the *Independent* in April, forgetting Honest Abe Lincoln's assessment of such efforts. "High risk funds offer big rewards", encouraged the *Sunday Times* in May. "Worried about risk – try zeros", the *Independent* suggested in November and three days later: "A capital idea that could be a nice little earner".

"Bravo to zeros – the City's best kept secret", declared the *Times* in January 1999 as the explosion in "splits" that was followed this year by their implosion began. The emotive phrase "best kept secret" was used a lot about "splits" encouraging private investors to believe they were participating with City insiders and the seriously rich. But as anyone knows – a secret shared is a secret lost.

Readers were told there was only "an outside chance" a trust would fail. Among the "splits" recommended was BFS's Geared Income and Income & Growth – both now casualties of the scandal. "The moral of this is if an investor is prepared to take a slightly higher level of risk, they can get a lot of extra return", a confident Tony Reid, investment director of BFS whose £4m home is on the market, told the *Times*. The real moral was not to believe in snake oil salesmen.

The *Sunday Times* joined the chorus. "Zeros

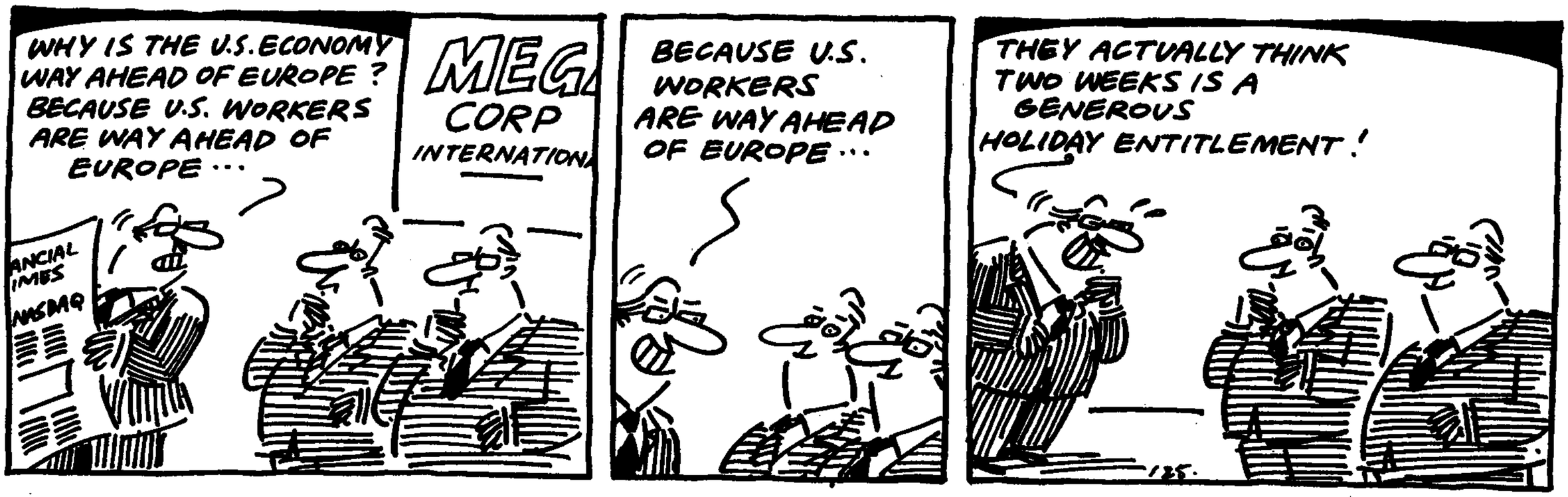
Number crunching

-21% ■ fall in Harrods' operating profits last year

+24% ■ pay rise Mohamed Fayed awarded himself last year

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG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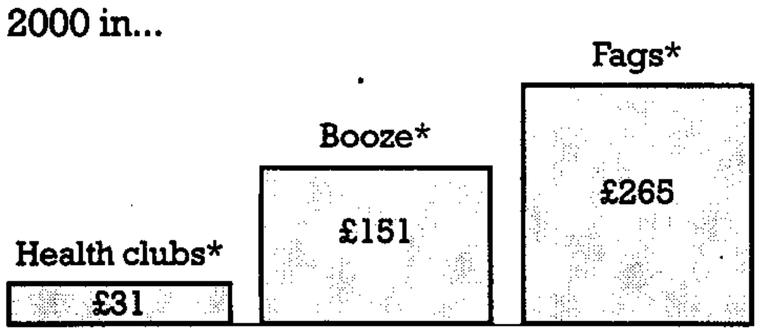
Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

New millennium

Value of £100 invested at the start of 2000 in...



*Shareholders' returns: Fitness First, LA Fitness & Holmes Place vs. distillers Allied Domecq & Diageo vs. Imperial Tobacco, BAT & Gallaher

can add up to give you a tidy sum", it gushed while reporting suggested returns of 20 percent and assuring that "no zero has ever failed to pay out what it promised". That is about to be tested by the 19 trusts which have failed or been suspended and the 14 more that are up to 97 percent below their launch price.

In August the *Independent* thought the safest way into "splits" was via the fund of funds route – the fatal magic circle policy which ultimately caused most damage to investors. "A zero option suits cautious", assured the *Mail on Sunday*. And so on and so on in August saying "zeros still look good value". And so on. No wonder by the end of 1999 investors had poured £3bn into split capital trusts given all the financial press hype and lucrative advertising which was able to draw on so many reported positive recommendations from personal finance experts.

The market yo-yo during 2000 cooled some of the financial press's enthusiasm and made the risks rather than rewards take a higher profile – though somewhat late in the day and too late for many investors. But there were still fans. "A row of zeros can add up to a lot" (or a little, as it has turned out) stated the *Times* in March. "If you are prepared to take the risk of losing your capital there are impressive returns", advised the *Guardian* in October 2000. The *Observer* was also still recommending "splits" in November.

Aberdeen's marketing chief Piers Currie was reported by the *Times* in October as stating that "zeros are good for the risk adverse". Tell that to Aberdeen clients whose "zeros" are suspended.

With the market boom clearly over in 2001, "splits" still had their attractions, according to the *Times*. Income shares were somehow still "one of the better kept secrets of the investment world" and the sector "teems with bargains for sophisticated investors in need of a chunky yield" even if those investors had to also have a "taste for risk". Even the *Financial Times* in March said "zeros are a plus" and a "relatively safe bet" – despite a recent sell-off which had boosted yields.

Not surprisingly, this widespread enthusiasm is not recalled by the same financial gurus who now fight for the rights of the victims of splits. Instead they recall the risk warnings that were, it was true, usually given and the emphasis on the least risky "zeros". But the effect of such caution was overwhelmed by the tidal wave of positive coverage powered in part by the all important advertising without which there would be no financial sections as we know them.

'Slicker'

Number crunching

-30% ■ drop in GlaxoSmithKline share price under leadership of Jean-Pierre Garnier

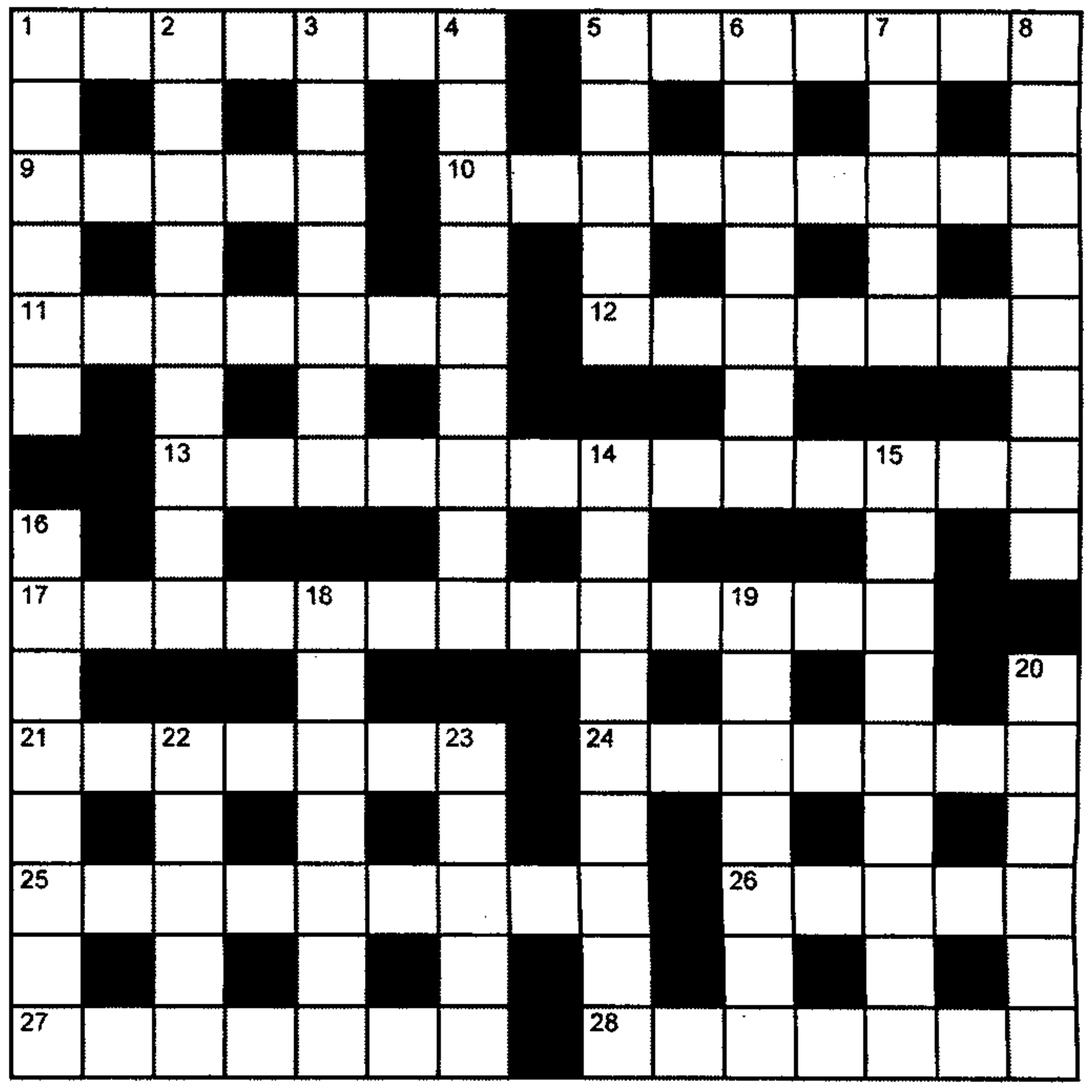
+300% ■ raise proposed for Jean-Pierre Garnier

EYE CROSSWORD 223

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 6 December 2002.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1 Disaster party's finished (5-2)
5 Has the facts on said business of nozzle modification (4,3)
9 Character's not all colossal phallus (5)
10 Hoping to secure a lay preaching opening in Hull? Note conversion (2,3,4)
11 House official, second to reach climax with Brenda (7)
12 Perhaps James Bond's taboo act: gobbling the woman (3-4)
13/14 Alan Bennett's query about the size of title role in his *Lady in the Van* overheard in female dressing room? (4,2,3,4,3,2,4)
17 Extensively manipulating members with butter, sportingly using fewer strokes (6-7)
21 After pot, news agency's on your back (5,2)
24 Exceedingly hard inside with the exception of Garnett (3,4)
25 "Mud hut with loo is filthy," he hollers (4-5)
26 Great, unlike Mr Heath (5)
27 Muscles misdirected love discharge (7)
28 Crude old broadcaster has Chet churning inside (7)

DOWN

1 Underwear, sexy without once being shameless (6)
2 Perhaps one of Bush's deceived voters offers cheek to interpreter (3-6)
3 Penetrating the girl, lack frigging restraint (7)
4 MP Roger's off in the morning – hidden agenda (9)
5 Unacceptable, Brown's last round with Blair? Yes – shortly to go (3,2)
6 Met's run out of breast supporter (7)
7 Union labour leaders stuck in Stalin's work unit (5)
8 Sexy Derek at fifty has hair rot (8)
14 See 13 Across
15 "Giving some corgi a stick is like group sex" (9)
16 Government savings scheme clanger associated with an old queen (8)
18 Say Lamb's crap, unfathomable (7)
19 Fervent trendy Tony's first seen to be ruffled (7)
20 No longer keen on ex-broadcaster's unsuccessful period (3-3)
22 Whacks off with Conservative yobs (5)
23 Stupid person, one of a number responsible for a loose movement? (5)

Crossword 222 winner: WILLIAM PARKER

ACROSS: 1 Thumbscrew 7 UFOs 9 Erection 10 Ignite 11 Russia 12 Nightcap 13/26 Technicolour yawn 17 Necrophiliac 20 Sob stuff 22 Ripsaw 24 Kibosh 25 Eyesores 27 Pittsburgh.

DOWN: 2 Hercules 3 Mucus 4 Slip a disc 5 Run into 6 Wring 7 Unnatural 8 Outlay 14 Hands down 15 Otherness 16 Lay an egg 18 Offbeat 19 Monica 21 Unhip 23 Pro-EU.

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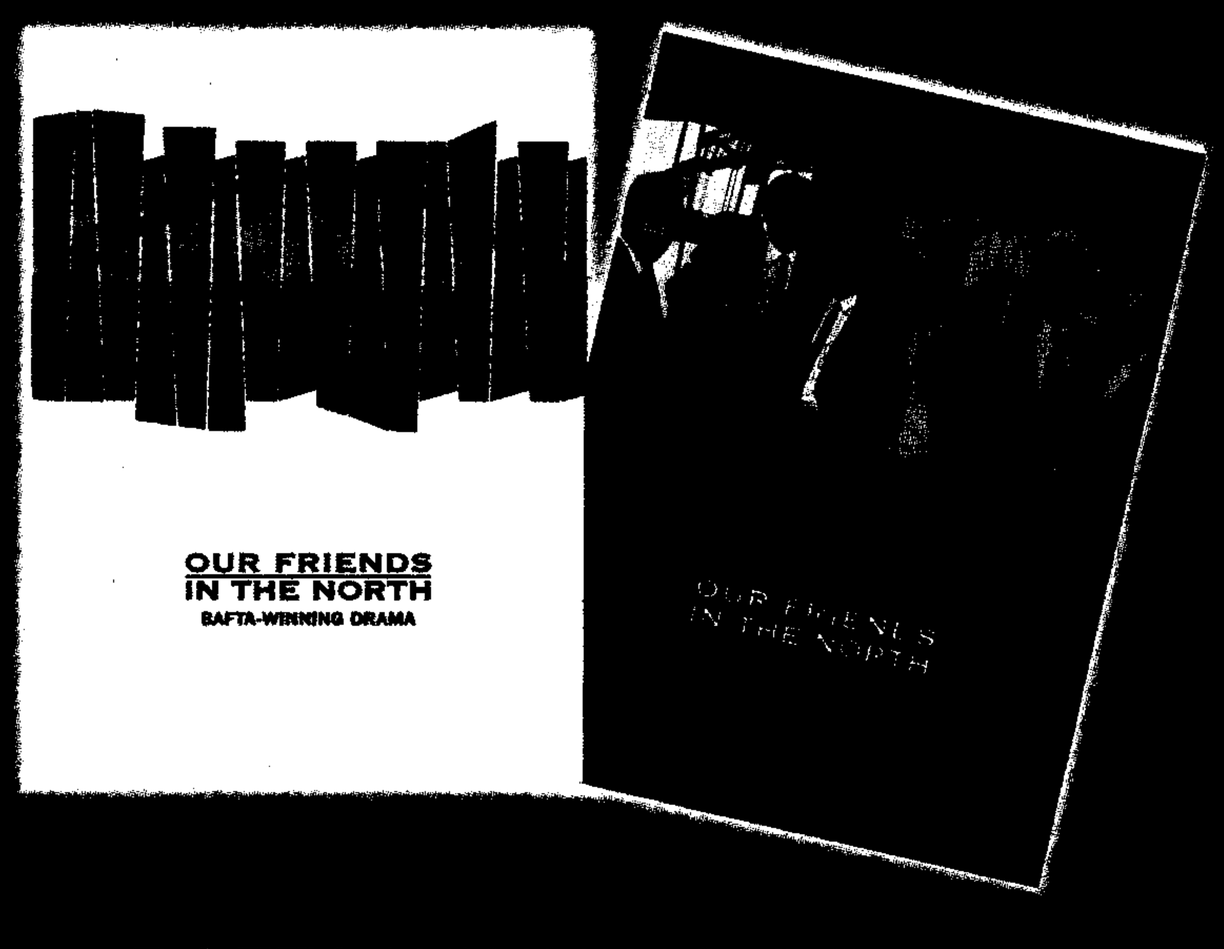

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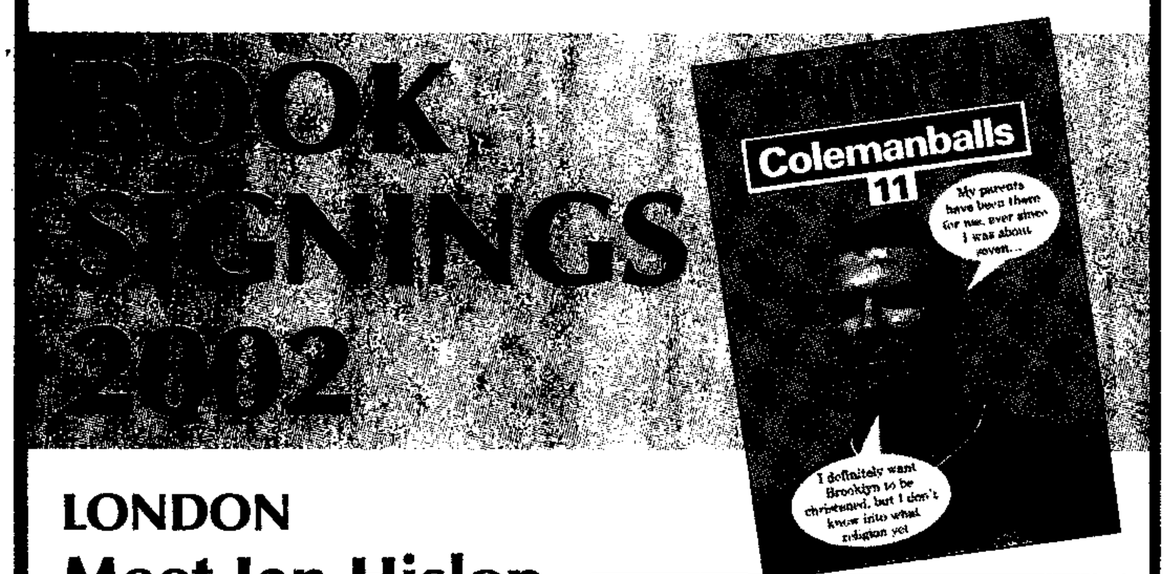
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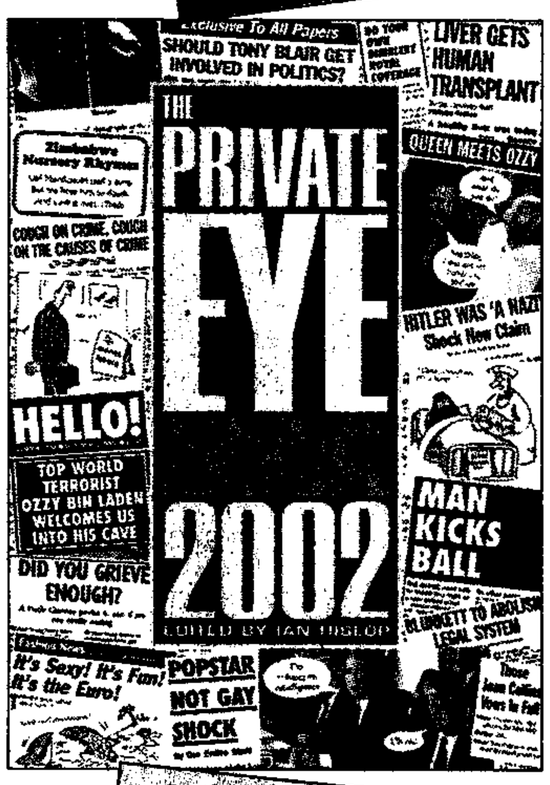
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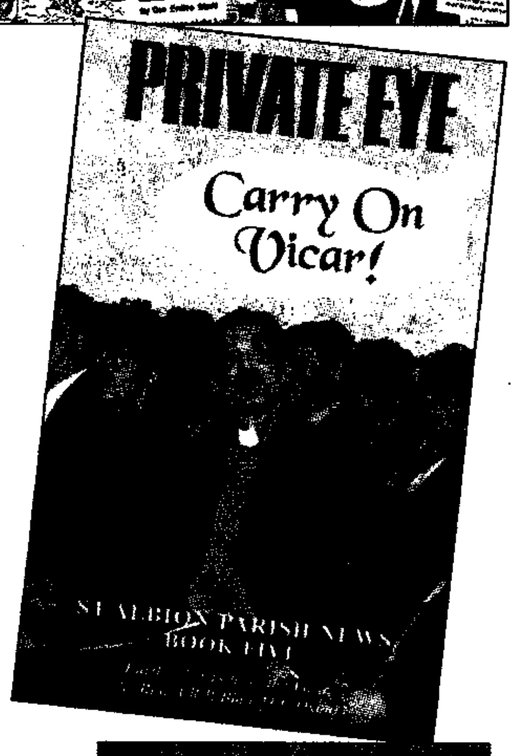

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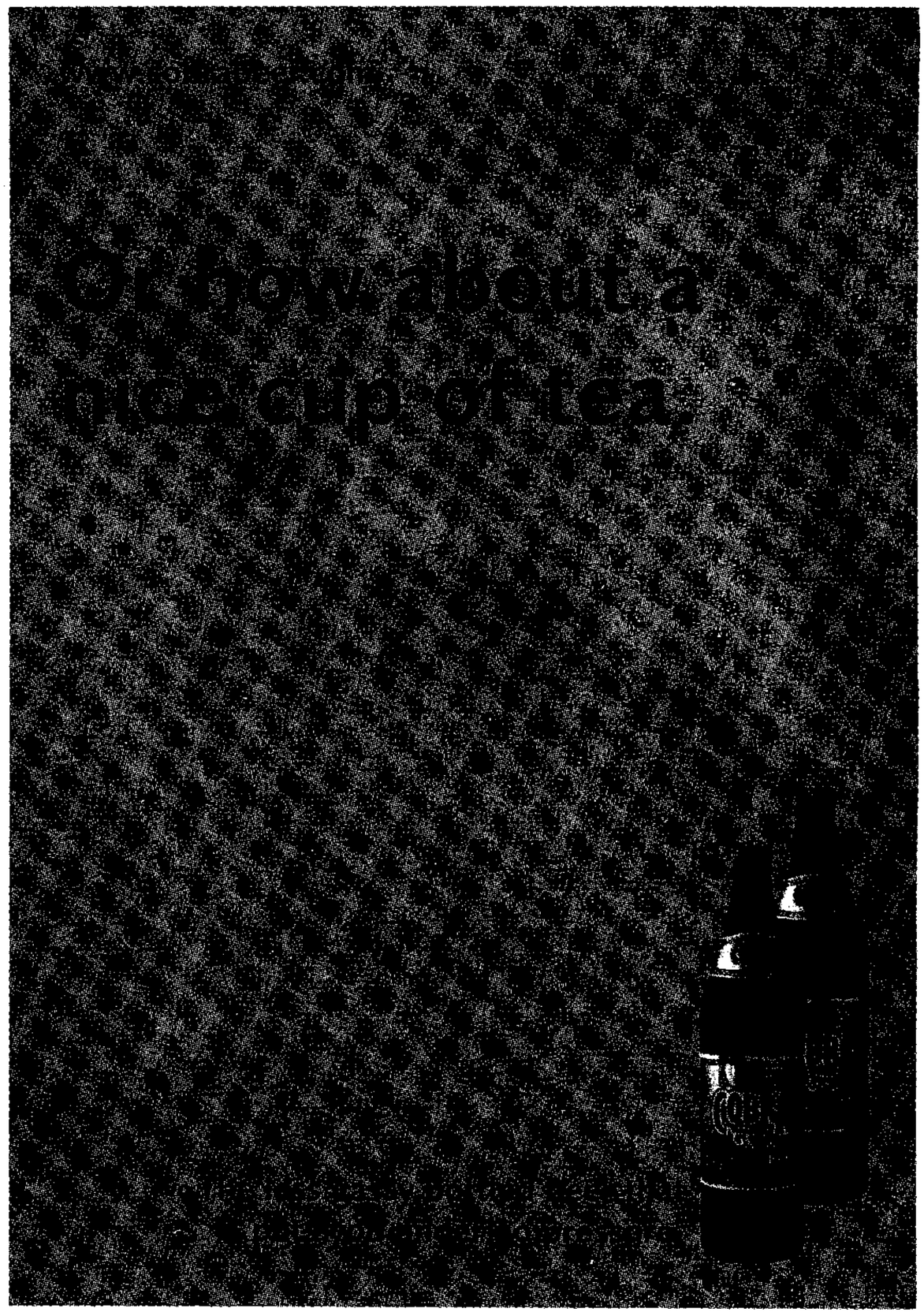

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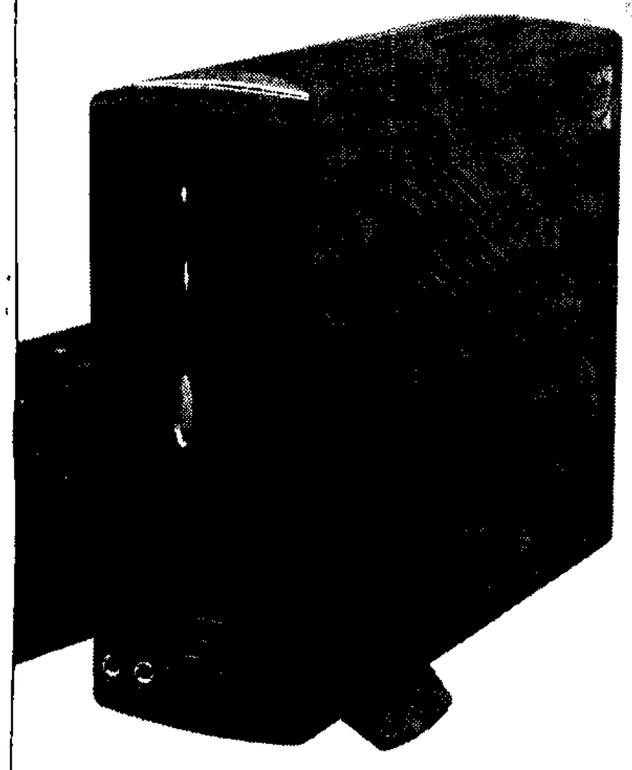

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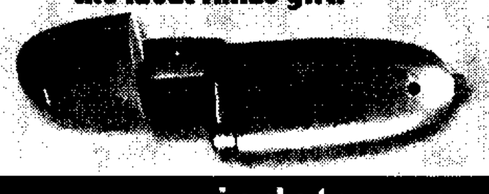

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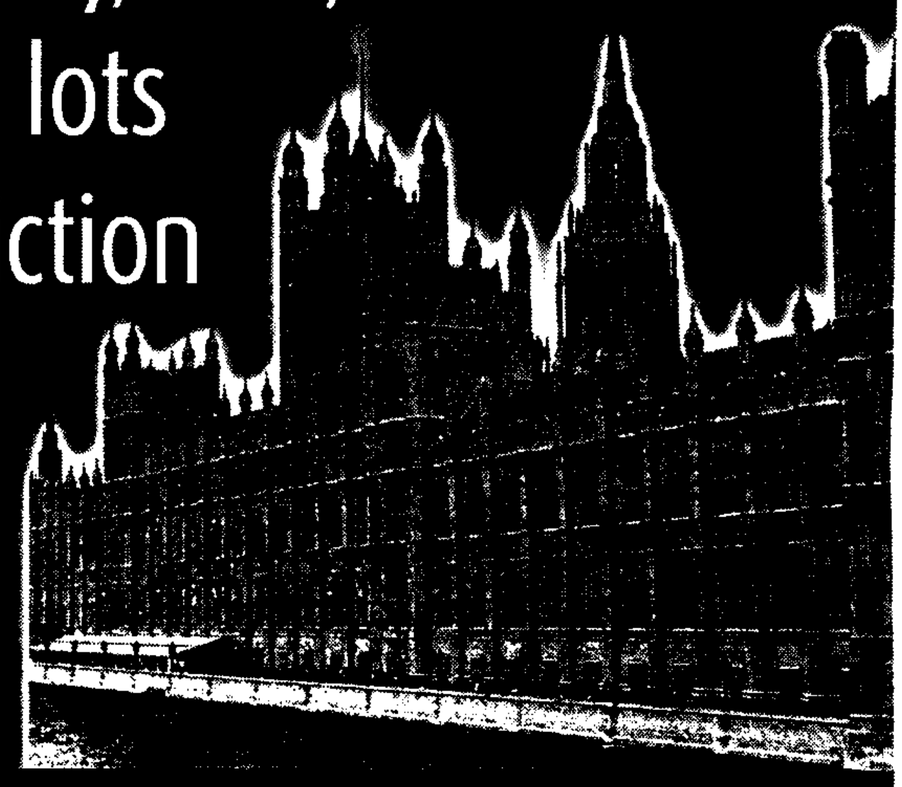

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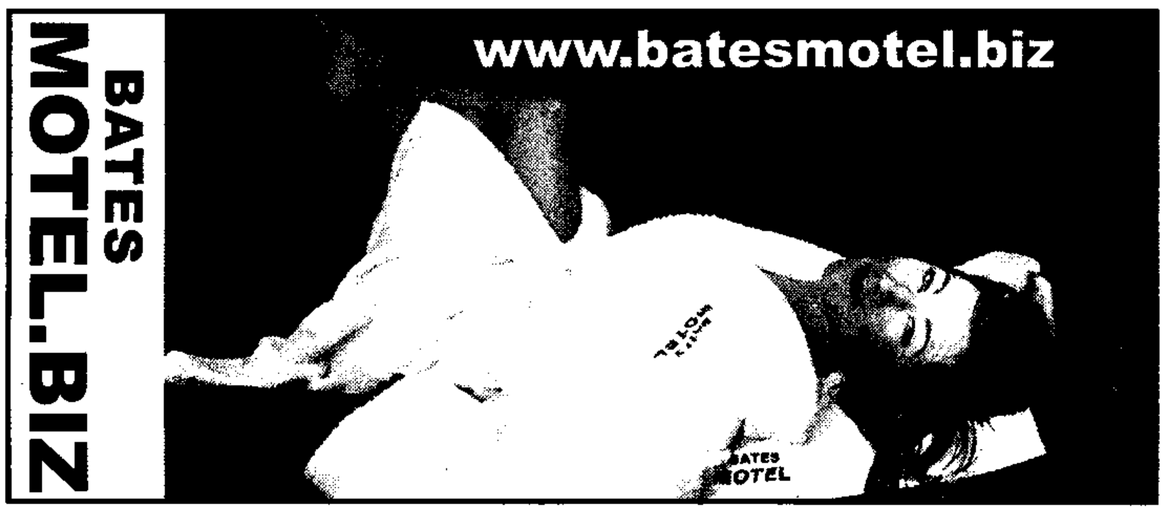

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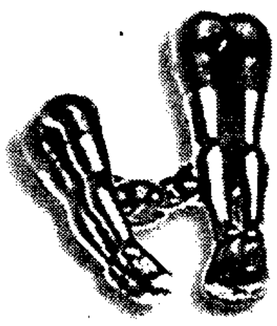

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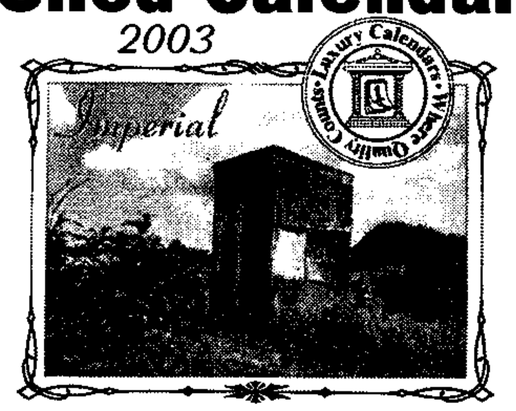

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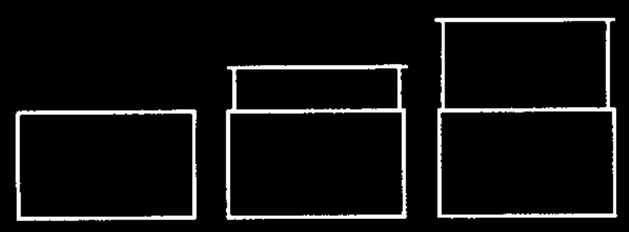

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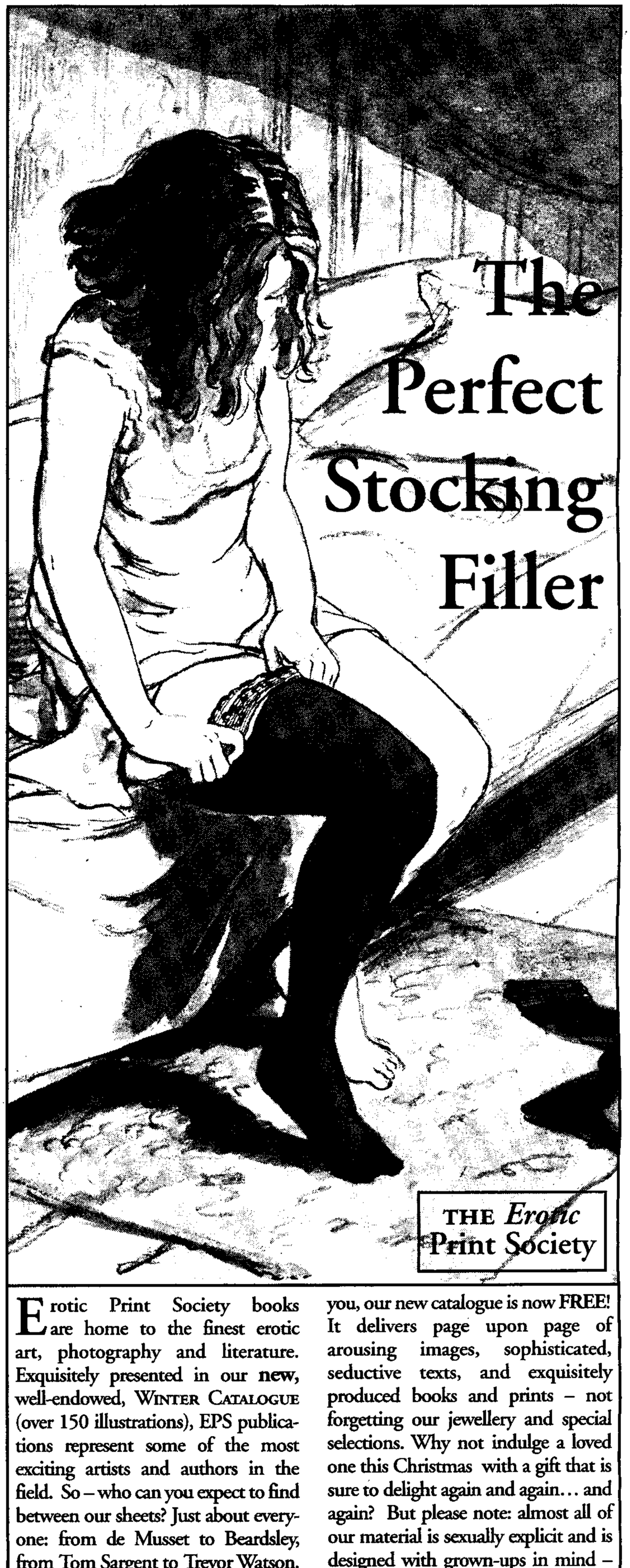

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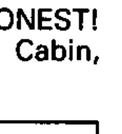

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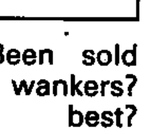

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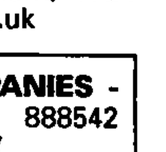

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LONELY THIS CHRISTMAS? Hell yes!! Don't want to be though. Male, 6'3", 33, dark hair. Not pretty, but funny - Email gopher_1999@hotmail.com

AN ATTRACTIVE and civilised London lady WLTM professional (City/Lawyer) 45+ London man for occasional meetings. Box 0568.

ENGLISH WOMAN (45) Golden Retriever (3) seek wry, pragmatic, resilient, male companion for six month sabbatical in Rome March 2003. Box 0468.

WIDOWER, 67, West Yorkshire, N/S. wishes to rebuild life with female partner. Good life style. International travel. Photo please. Box 0768.

SENSITIVE, LIBERAL, academic female, 31, seeks similar male, 35-45, interested in exploring life, for friendship or more. ballet-tanzerin@danceart.net

AWAY FROM YOUR REGULAR LONDON CROWD, meet an attractive, slim, green-eyed 35 year old man. Socialist banker with artistic interests, attached but not happy for a long time. I'm taking the plunge, come join me. Email passionfruit@btconnect.com

PRETTY, SLIM LADY 40-50 wanted. Rent free sole use of lovely Dorset cottage, exchange occasional favours. E-mail mike@stur1.demon.co.uk

VIVACIOUS CURVACEOUS London widow seeks no smoking unattached solvent male for 55 to 65 happy times possible longterm relationship. Box 1168.

ARTHUR DENT, 31, wltm Fenchurch, 25-30, for life, the universe and everything. Box 0666.

LITERATE, FUN professional male, 30s, WLTM slim but curvy arty female, 25-35 yrs. London/Mids/North. E-mail: cah0831@yahoo.co.uk.

AUTHORITATIVE MALE - presentable, solvent, 50s - seeks a wilful lady living in London or Home Counties. Phone 07960 413607.

GROOMED, FIT, celtic muse (40s) seeks mature mistress (50+) to serve 24/7 (new car). Box 0968.

Replying to a

PRIVATE EYE

Smalls box number?
Address your reply like this:

Box No...
PRIVATE EYE
Communications Team
Exmouth House
3-11 Pine Street
LONDON EC1R OJH

SHY CLEVER WISTFUL F sought by M 54, W10 – wolstandixie@hotmail.com

ECCENTRIC, BOOKISH MALE, sixties child, seeks libidinous underappreciated blue stocking for convoluted conversations, paraphyschological peregrinations, tantric trysts and kindred spirituality. Central East, Far North, Anywhere. Box 0368.

LIFE'S A BEACH... Romantic mellow male, young 49, seeks warm sensual petite, non smoking female (38+) to enjoy stuff..!! keithsco@hotmail.com or Box 0167.

TALL, CULTURED, SUCCESSFUL and very generous single man 40 Bristol/South West seeks a younger woman to spoil and pamper and to share the Autumn with. I live life to the full; film, theatre, travel, eating out and eating in, laughter and the rich tapestry of life. If you would like a passionate relationship with a sensual man who loves nights on the town and weekends in the country, please contact me with your telephone number Box 0264 or eveready690@yahoo.com

ELEGANT, SLIM, with a lively intelligence, generous spirit and a passion for the outdoors, my client has built up a successful career and is now ready to develop other interests. An enthusiastic traveller, she enjoys classical music, dancing, swimming, is widely read and knowledgeable on wine and current affairs. Quietly confident, she is valued for her gentle humour, empathy and wise advice. Ideally, you are 55-65, tall, confident, take care of your appearance, a professional - perhaps retired - with an enquiring mind. Location unimportant. If you WLTM her, call Heather Heber-Percy at The County Register on 0207 738 4470 and quote Ref GPE or E-mail: enquiries@thecountyregister.com

WIN!

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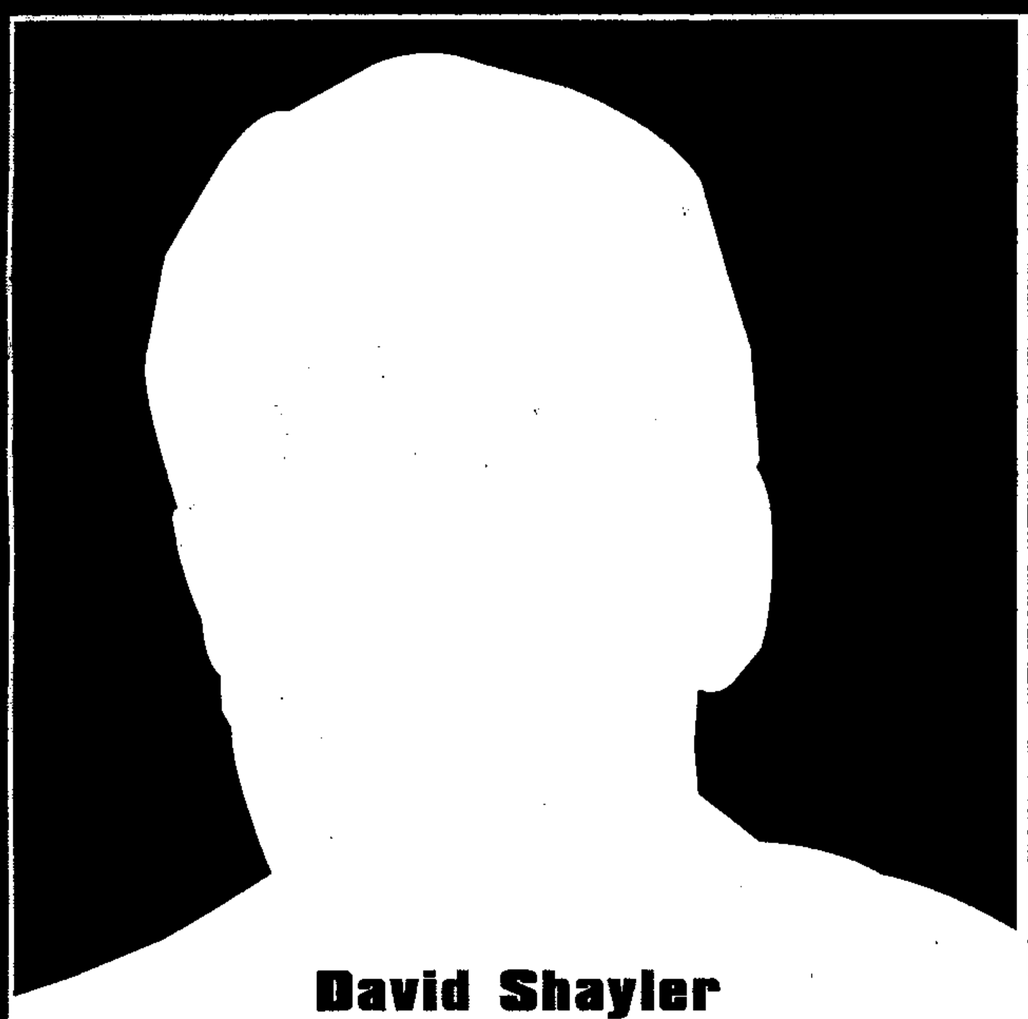
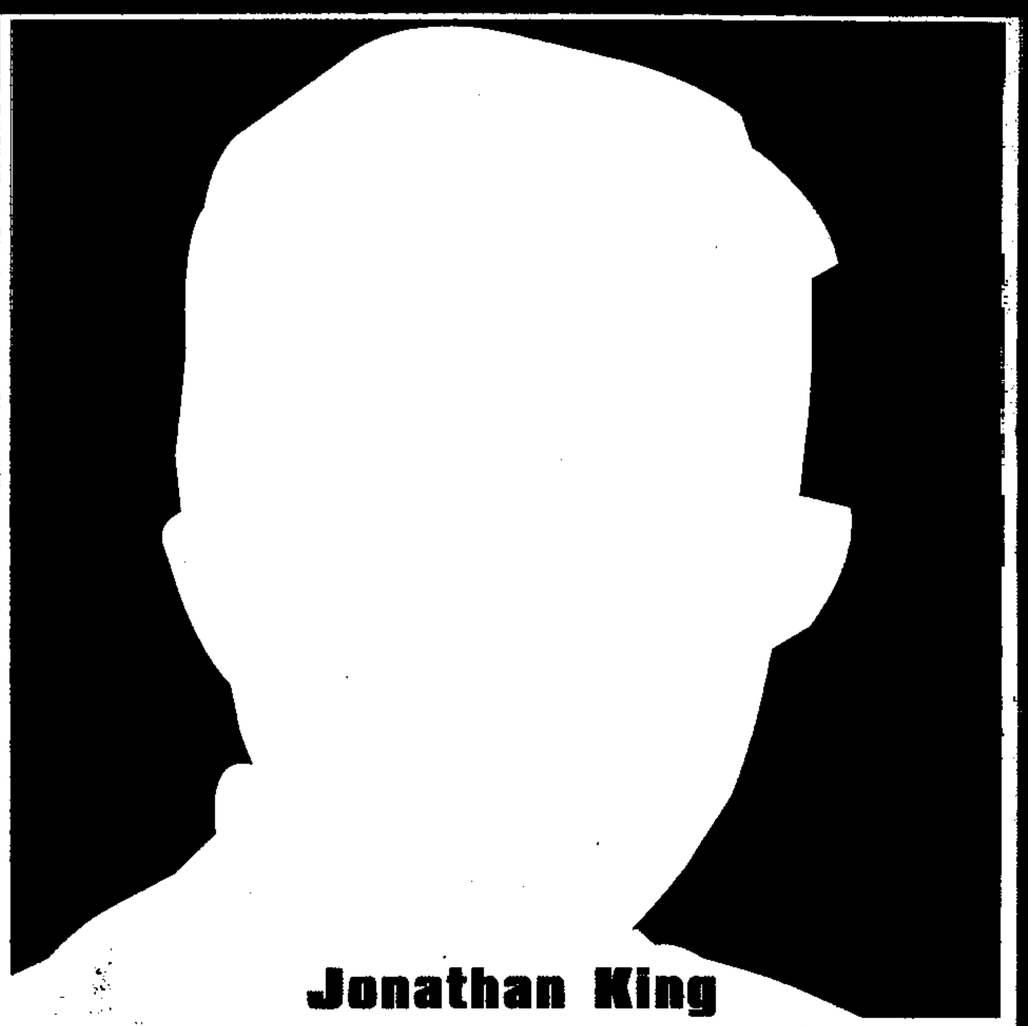


David Shayler



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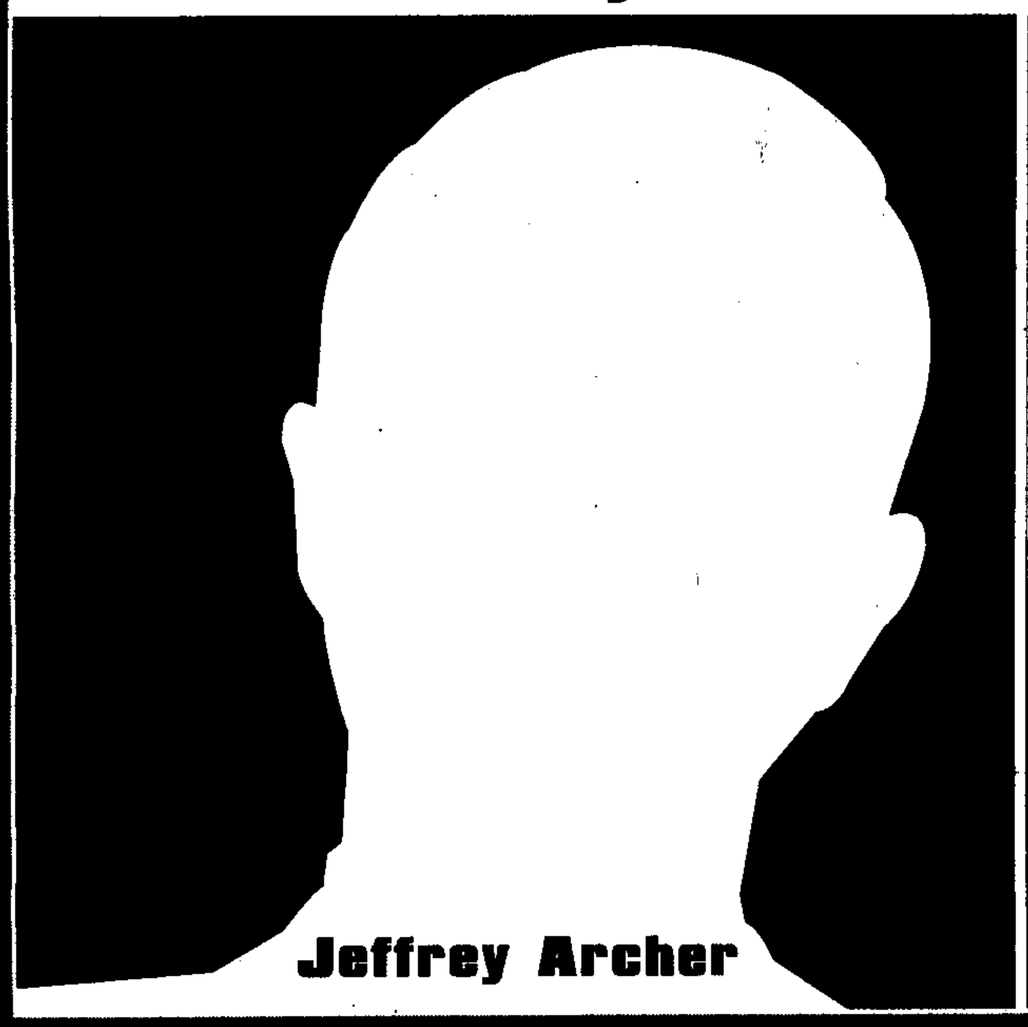

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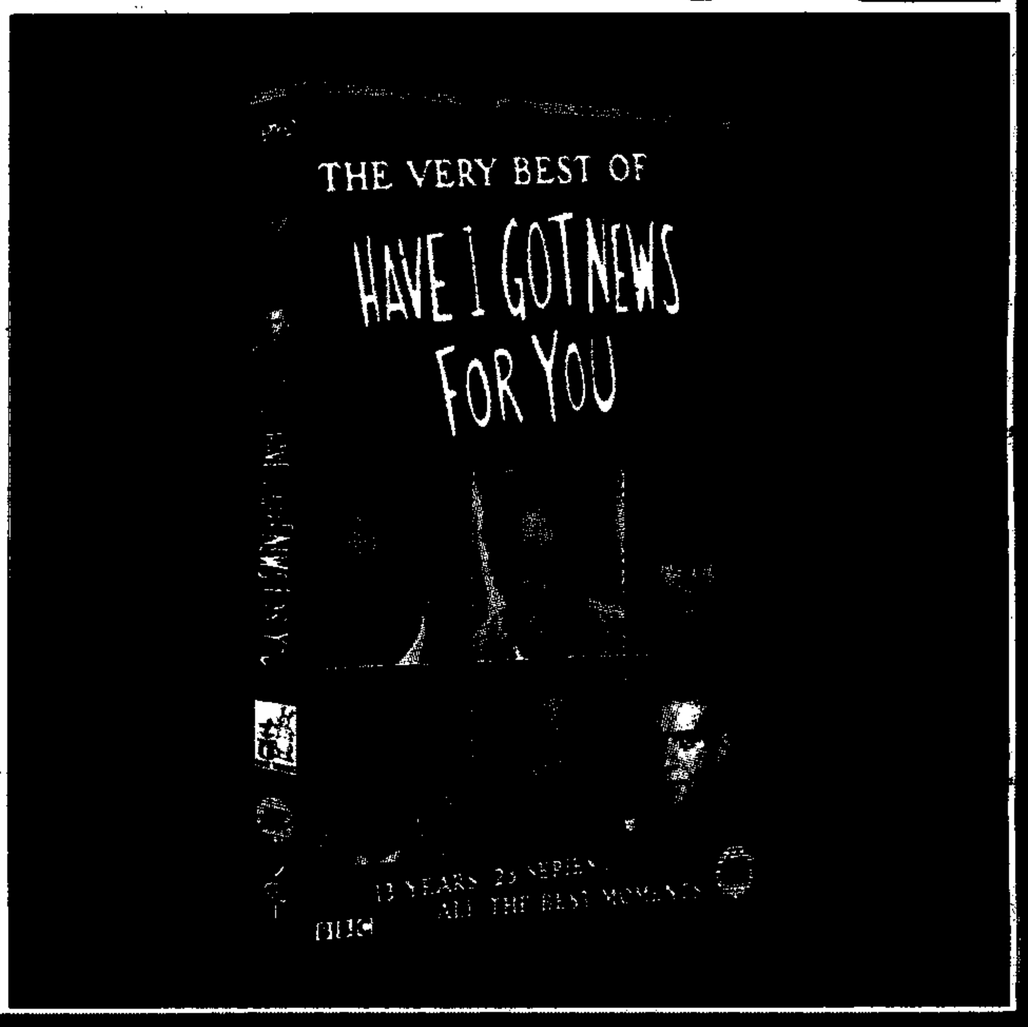

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